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THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL

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'HELLO, MOTHER! WHAT HAVE YOU GOT THERE?'

THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL ^{2/-}

BY
BARONESS ORCZY

Krishna Meertly
9th Std D Sec.

Abridged and Edited by

R. C. GOFFIN, M.A.

Formerly of the Indian Educational Service

WITH FOUR ILLUSTRATIONS

BY H. M. BROCK

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APPROXIMATE PRONUNCIATION OF FRENCH NAMES

Bibot	=	Beebo
Grospierre	=	Gro-pee-air
Duke of Chalis	=	Shal-ee
de Tournay	=	Tor-nay
Chauvelin	=	Show-veh-lang
St Just	=	Sang Joost
St Cyr	=	Sang Seer
Cape Gris-Nez	=	Gree Nay
Brogard	=	Bro-gar
Desgas	=	Day-gar
Lille	=	Leel
Miquelon	=	Meek-eh-lawng

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CHAPTER I

PARIS: SEPTEMBER, 1792

IT was a surging, murmuring crowd of beings, human only in name, for to the eye and ear they seemed but savage creatures, animated by vile passions and by the lust of vengeance and of hate. The hour was some little time before sunset, and the place, the West Barricade in Paris.

During the greater part of the day the guillotine had been kept busy at its ghastly work: all that France had boasted of in the past centuries of ancient names, and blue blood, had paid toll to her desire for liberty and for fraternity. The slaughter had only ceased at this late hour of the day because there were other more interesting sights for the people to witness, a little while before the final closing of the city gates for the night. And so the crowd made for the various barricades in order to watch this interesting and amusing sight.

It was to be seen every day, for those aristocrats were such fools! Every afternoon before the gates closed and the market carts went out in procession by the various gates, they would try to evade the clutches of the Committee of Public Safety. In various disguises, under various pretexts, they tried to slip through the barriers which were so well guarded by citizen soldiers of the Republic. Men in women's clothes, women in male attire, children disguised in beggars' rags: there were some of all sorts: counts, marquises, even dukes, who wanted to flee from France, reach England, or some other foreign country, and there try to rouse feeling against the glorious Revolution, or to raise an army in order to liberate the wretched prisoners in the Temple, who had once called themselves sovereigns of France.

But they were nearly always caught at the barricades. Sergeant Bibot especially at the West Gate had a wonderful

nose for scenting an aristocrat in the most perfect disguise. Then, of course, the fun began. Bibot would look at his prey as a cat looks upon a mouse, play with him, sometimes for quite a quarter of an hour, pretend to be hoodwinked by the disguise, by the wigs and other bits of theatrical make-up which hid the identity of some marquis or count.

Sometimes Bibot would let his prey actually out by the gates, allowing him to think for the space of two minutes at least that he had really escaped out of Paris, and might even manage to reach the coast of England in safety. Bibot would let the unfortunate wretch walk ten yards towards the open country, then he would send two men after him and bring him back stripped of his disguise.

No wonder that on this fine afternoon in September the crowd round Bibot's gate was eager and excited. The lust of blood grows with its satisfaction; there is never enough: the crowd had seen a hundred noble heads fall beneath the guillotine that day, it wanted to make sure that it would see another hundred fall on the morrow.

Bibot was sitting on an overturned and empty cask close by the gate of the barricade; a small detachment of citizen soldiers were under his command. Today all the sergeants in command at the various barricades had had special orders. Recently a very great number of aristocrats had succeeded in escaping out of France and reaching England. There were curious rumours about these escapes; they had become singularly daring; the people's minds were becoming strangely excited about it all. Sergeant Gospierre had been sent to the guillotine for allowing a whole family of aristocrats to slip out of the North Gate under his very nose.

It was asserted that these escapes were organized by a band of Englishmen, whose daring seemed to be unparalleled and who, from sheer desire to meddle in what did not concern them, spent their spare time in snatching away lawful victims destined for the guillotine. These rumours soon grew in extravagance; there was no doubt that this band of meddlesome Englishmen did exist;

moreover, they seemed to be under the leadership of a man whose pluck and audacity were almost fabulous. Strange stories were afloat of how he and those he rescued became suddenly invisible as they reached the barricades, and escaped out of the gates by sheer supernatural agency.

No one had seen these mysterious Englishmen ; as for their leader, he was never spoken of, save with a superstitious shudder. The President of the Committee of Public Safety would in the course of the day receive a scrap of paper from some mysterious source ; sometimes he would find it in the pocket of his coat, at others it would be handed to him by some one in the crowd. The paper always contained a brief notice that the band of meddlesome Englishmen were at work, and it was always signed with a device drawn in red—a little star-shaped flower, which in England is called the Scarlet Pimpernel. Within a few hours of the receipt of this impudent notice, the members of the Committee would hear that so many royalists and aristocrats had succeeded in reaching the coast, and were on their way to England.

The guards at the gates had been doubled, the sergeants in command had been threatened with death, while liberal rewards were offered for the capture of these daring and impudent Englishmen. There was a sum of five thousand francs promised to the man who laid hands on their leader, the mysterious and elusive 'Scarlet Pimpernel' himself. Every one felt that Bibot would be that man, and Bibot allowed that belief to take firm root in everybody's mind ; and so, day after day, people came to watch him at the West Gate, so as to be present when he laid hands on any fugitive aristocrat who might be accompanied by that mysterious Englishman.

' Bah ! ' he said to his trusted corporal, ' Citizen Grospierre was a fool ! Had it been I now, at that North Gate last week. . . .' Bibot spat on the ground to express his contempt for his comrade's stupidity.

' How did it happen, citizen ? ' asked the corporal.

' Grospierre was at the gate, keeping good watch,' began Bibot, pompously, as the crowd closed in round

him, listening eagerly to his narrative. ' We've all heard of this meddlesome Englishman, this accursed Scarlet Pimpernel. He won't get through *my* gate, by Heaven ! unless he be the devil himself. But Gospierre was a fool. The market carts were going through the gates ; there was one laden with casks, and driven by an old man, with a boy beside him. Gospierre thought himself very clever ; he looked into the casks—most of them, at least—and saw they were empty, and let the cart go through.'

A murmur of wrath and contempt went round the group of ill-clad wretches who crowded round.

' Half an hour later,' continued the sergeant, ' up comes a captain of the guard with a squad of some dozen soldiers with him. " Has a cart gone through ? " he asks of Gospierre, breathlessly. " Yes," says Gospierre, " not half an hour ago." " And you have let them escape," shouts the captain furiously. " You'll go to the guillotine for this, sergeant ! that cart held concealed the Duke of Chalis and all his family ! " " What !" thunders Gospierre, aghast. " Aye ! and the driver was none other than that cursed Englishman, the Scarlet Pimpernel."'

A howl of rage greeted this tale. Gospierre had paid for his blunder on the guillotine, but what a fool ! oh ! what a fool ! Bibot was laughing so much at his own tale that it was some time before he could continue.

" After them, my men," shouts the captain, he said, at last, " remember the reward ; after them, they cannot have gone far ! " And with that he rushes through the gate, followed by his dozen soldiers.'

' But it was too late ! ' shouted the crowd, excitedly. ' They never got them ! . . . Curse that Gospierre for his folly. . . . He deserved his fate ! . . . Fancy not examining those casks properly ! '

All these comments seemed to amuse Citizen Bibot exceedingly ; he laughed until his sides ached, and the tears streamed down his cheeks. ' Nay, nay ! ' he said at last, ' those aristocrats weren't in the cart ! the driver was not the Scarlet Pimpernel ! '

‘ What ! ’

‘ No ! It was the captain of the guard who was the Englishman in disguise, and every one of his soldiers aristocrats ! ’

The crowd this time said nothing : the story certainly savoured of the supernatural. Truly that Englishman must be the devil himself.

The sun was sinking low in the west. Bibot prepared himself to close the gates. ‘ Let the carts come up now,’ he said.

Some dozen covered carts were drawn up in a row, ready to leave the city, in order to fetch the produce from the country close by, for market the next morning. They were mostly well known to Bibot, as they went through his gate twice every day on their way to and from the city. He spoke to one or two of their drivers—mostly women—and was at great pains to examine the inside of the carts. ‘ You never know,’ he would say, ‘ and I’m not going to be caught like that fool Gospierre.’

The women who drove the carts usually spent their day beneath the platform of the guillotine, knitting and gossiping. It was great fun to see the aristocrats arriving, and the places close by the platform were very much sought after. Bibot, during the day, had been on duty nearby. He recognized most of the old hags who sat there and knitted whilst head after head fell beneath the knife.

‘ Hello, mother ! ’ said Bibot to one of these horrible hags, ‘ what have you got there ? ’

He had seen her earlier in the day, with her knitting and the whip of her cart close beside her. Now she had fastened a row of curly locks to the whip handle, all colours, from gold to silver, fair to dark, and she stroked them with her huge, bony fingers as she laughed at Bibot.

‘ I made friends with the executioner,’ she said with a coarse laugh, ‘ he cut these off for me. He has promised me some more tomorrow, but I don’t know if I shall be at my usual place.’

‘ Ah ! how is that, mother ? ’ asked Bibot, who,

hardened soldier though he was, could not help shuddering at the awful loathsomeness of this semblance of a woman, with a ghastly trophy on the handle of her whip.

‘ My grandson has got the small-pox,’ she said with a jerk of her thumb towards the inside of her cart, ‘ some say it’s the plague ! ’ If it is, I shan’t be allowed to come into Paris tomorrow.’

At the first mention of the word small-pox, Bibot had stepped hastily backwards, and when the old hag spoke of the plague, he retreated from her as fast as he could. ‘ Curse you ! ’ he muttered, whilst the whole crowd hastily avoided the cart, leaving it standing all alone in the middle of the road. The old hag laughed.

‘ Curse you for a coward,’ she said. ‘ Bah ! what a man to be afraid of sickness.’

‘ Faith ! the plague ! ’

Every one was awe-struck and silent, filled with horror for the loathsome malady, the one thing which still had the power to arouse terror and disgust in these savage, brutalized creatures.

‘ Get out with you and with your plague-stricken brood ! ’ shouted Bibot, hoarsely. And with another rough laugh and coarse jest, the old hag whipped up her lean nag and drove her cart out of the gate.

This incident had spoiled the afternoon. The people were terrified of these two horrible maladies which nothing could cure, and which were the precursors of an awful and lonely death. They hung about the gates, silent and sullen for a while, eyeing one another suspiciously, avoiding each other as if by instinct, lest the plague lurked already in their midst. Presently, as in the case of Grospierre, a captain of the guard appeared suddenly. But he was known to Bibot, and there was no fear of his turning out to be a sly Englishman in disguise. ‘ A cart . . . ’ he shouted breathlessly, even before he had reached the gates.

‘ What cart ? ’ asked Bibot, roughly.

‘ Driven by an old hag. A covered cart.’

‘ There were a dozen.’

'An old hag who said her son had the plague?'

'Yes.'

'You have not let them go?'

'A thousand curses!' cried Bibot, whose purple cheeks had suddenly become white with fear.

'The cart contained the Countess de Tournay and her two children, all of them traitors and condemned to death.'

'And their driver?' muttered Bibot, as a superstitious shudder ran down his spine.

'Faith!' said the captain, 'none other than that accursed Englishman himself—the Scarlet Pimpernel.'

CHAPTER II

DOVER: 'THE FISHERMAN'S REST'

THE coffee-room of 'The Fisherman's Rest' in Dover is a show place now. In the year 1792, it had not yet gained that notoriety and importance which a hundred or more years have since bestowed upon it. Yet it was an old place, even then, for the oak rafters and beams were already black with age—as were the panelled seats, with their tall backs, and the long polished tables between, on which innumerable pewter tankards had left fantastic patterns of many-sized rings. In the leaded window, high up, a row of pots of scarlet and blue flowers gave a bright note of colour against the dull background of the oak.

That Mr Jellyband, the landlord, was a prosperous man, was of course clear to the most casual observer. The pewter on the fine old dressers, the brass above the gigantic hearth, shone like gold and silver—the red-tiled floor was as brilliant as the scarlet flowers on the window sill—this meant that his servants were good and plentiful, that the custom was constant, and of that order which necessitated the keeping up of the coffee-room to a high standard of elegance and order.

But now his daughter Sally came running in, very excited and very eager.

‘I think I saw Lord Antony’s horse out in the yard, father,’ she said. Worthy Mr Jellyband came bustling forward, alert and fussy, as became the advent of one of the most favoured guests of his hotel.

Lord Antony Dewhurst, one of the sons of the Duke of Exeter, was in those days a perfect type of a young English gentleman—tall, well set-up, broad of shoulders and merry of face, his laughter rang out loudly wherever he went. A good sportsman, a lively companion, a courteous well-bred man of the world, with not too much brains to spoil his temper, he was a universal favourite in London drawing-rooms or in the coffee-rooms of village inns. At ‘The Fisherman’s Rest’ every one knew him—for he was fond of a trip across to France, and always spent a night under worthy Mr Jellyband’s roof on his way there or back.

He crossed over to the hearth to warm and dry himself: as he did so, he cast a quick, somewhat suspicious glance at two strangers, who were playing dominoes in a corner, and for a moment a look of deep earnestness, even of anxiety, clouded his jovial young face.

But only for a moment: the next he had turned to one of the villagers, who was respectfully touching his forelock.

‘Well, Mr Hempseed, and how is the fruit?’

‘Badly, my lord, badly,’ replied Mr Hempseed, dolefully, ‘but what can you expect with this government favouring those rascals over in France, who would murder their king and all their nobility?’

‘Faith!’ retorted Lord Antony; ‘So they would, honest Hempseed,—at least those they can get hold of, worse luck! But we have some friends coming here tonight, who at any rate have evaded their clutches.’ It almost seemed, when the young man said these words, as if he threw a defiant look towards the quiet strangers in the corner.

‘Thanks to you, my lord, and to your friends, so I’ve heard it said,’ said Mr Jellyband.

But in a moment Lord Antony's hand fell warningly on the innkeeper's arm.

'Hush!' he said sternly, and instinctively once again looked towards the strangers.

'Oh! Lord love you, they are all right, my lord,' retorted Jellyband; 'don't you be afraid. I shouldn't have spoken, only I knew we were among friends. That gentleman over there is as true and loyal a subject of King George as you are yourself, my lord. He is but lately arrived in Dover, and is settling down in business in these parts.'

'Oh, that's all right, then, if we are among friends,' said Lord Antony, who evidently did not care to discuss the subject with his host. 'But, tell me, you have no one else staying here, have you?'

'No one, my lord, and no one coming either, except——'

'Except?'

'No one your lordship would object to, I know.'

'Who is it?'

'Well, my lord, Sir Percy Blakeney and his lady will be here presently, but they aren't going to stay——'

'Lady Blakeney?' queried Lord Antony, in some astonishment.

'Aye, my lord. Sir Percy's skipper was here just now. He says that Lady Blakeney's brother is crossing over to France today in the *Day Dream*, Sir Percy's yacht, and Sir Percy and his lady will come with him as far as here to see the last of him. It doesn't put you out, does it, my lord?'

'No, no, it doesn't put me out, friend; nothing will put me out, unless that supper is not the very best which Miss Sally can cook, and which has ever been served in "The Fisherman's Rest."'

'Here is the party from France, I do believe,' said Sally excitedly, as a distant clatter of horses and wheels could now be distinctly heard, drawing rapidly nearer.

There was general commotion in the coffee-room. Every one was curious to see Lord Antony's noble friends. Miss Sally cast one or two quick glances at the little bit

of mirror which hung on the wall, and worthy Mr Jellyband hustled out in order to give the first welcome himself to his distinguished guests. Only the two strangers in the corner did not share the excitement. They were calmly finishing their game of dominoes, and did not even look once towards the door.

‘Straight ahead, Countess, the door on your right,’ said a pleasant voice outside.

‘Aye, there they are, all right enough,’ said Lord Antony, joyfully; ‘off with you, my pretty Sally, and see how quickly you can dish up the soup.’

The door was thrown wide open, and, preceded by Mr Jellyband, who was profuse in his bows and welcomes, a party of four—two ladies and two gentlemen—entered the coffee-room.

‘Welcome! Welcome to old England!’ said Lord Antony, as he came eagerly forward with both hands outstretched towards the newcomers.

‘Ah, you are Lord Antony Dewhurst, I think,’ said one of the ladies, speaking with a strong foreign accent.

‘At your service, Madam,’ he replied, as he ceremoniously saluted both the ladies, and then turned to the men and shook them warmly by the hand. Sally was already helping the ladies to take off their travelling cloaks, and both turned, with a shiver, towards the brightly-blazing hearth. Sally then hustled off to her kitchen, whilst Jellyband, still profuse with his respectful salutations, arranged one or two chairs round the fire. Every one was staring curiously, yet deferentially, at the foreigners.

‘Ah, gentlemen! what can I say?’ said the elder of the two ladies, as she stretched a pair of fine, aristocratic hands to the warmth of the blaze, and looked with unspeakable gratitude first at Lord Antony, then at one of the young men who had accompanied her party, and who was busy divesting himself of his heavy, caped coat.

‘Only that you are glad to be in England, Countess,’ replied Lord Antony, ‘and that you have not suffered too much from your trying voyage.’

'Indeed, indeed, we are glad to be in England,' she said, while her eyes filled with tears, 'and we have already forgotten all that we have suffered.' Her voice was musical and low, and there was a great deal of calm dignity and of many sufferings nobly endured marked in the handsome, aristocratic face, with its wealth of snow-white hair dressed high above the forehead, after the fashion of the times.

'I hope my friend, Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, proved an entertaining travelling companion, Madam?'

'Ah, indeed, Sir Andrew was kindness itself. How can my children and I ever show enough gratitude to you all?'

Her daughter, a dainty, girlish figure, childlike and pathetic in her fatigue and sorrow, had said nothing as yet, but her eyes, large, brown, and full of tears, looked up from the fire and sought those of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, who had drawn near the hearth and her; then, as they met his, which were fixed with unconcealed admiration upon the sweet face before him, a warmer colour rushed up to her pale cheeks.

'So this is England,' she said, as she looked round with childlike curiosity at the open hearth, the oak rafters, and the yokels with their elaborate smocks and jovial, rubicund countenances.

'A bit of it,' replied Sir Andrew, smiling, 'but all of it at your service.'

The young girl blushed again, but this time a bright smile lit up her dainty face. She said nothing, and Sir Andrew, too, was silent, yet those two young people understood one another, as young people have a way of doing all the world over.

'But I say, supper!' here broke in Lord Antony's jovial voice, 'supper, honest Jellyband. Where is that pretty wench of yours and the dish of soup? La, man, while you stand there gaping at the ladies, they will faint with hunger.'

There was general bustle in the coffee-room: most of the yokels and fishermen had gone to make way for the

noble folk, and to finish smoking their pipes elsewhere. Only the two strangers stayed on, quietly and unconcernedly playing their game of dominoes and sipping their wine.

Lord Antony sat down at the head of the supper table, with the Countess on his right. Jellyband bustled round, filling glasses and putting chairs straight. Sally waited, ready to hand the soup.

CHAPTER III

THE LEAGUE OF THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL

THEY looked a merry, even a happy party, as they sat round the table ; Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Antony Dewhurst, two typical good-looking, well-born and well-bred Englishmen of the day, and the aristocratic Countess de Tournay with her son and daughter, who had just escaped from such dire perils and found a safe retreat at last on the shores of protecting England.

In the corner the two strangers had apparently finished their game ; one of them arose, and standing with his back to the merry company at the table, adjusted with much deliberation his large triple-caped coat. As he did so, he gave one quick glance all around him. Every one was busy laughing and chatting, and he murmured the words 'All safe !' : his companion then, with the alertness born of long practice, slipped to his knees in a moment, and crept noiselessly under the oak bench. The stranger then with a loud 'Goodnight', quietly walked out of the coffee-room. Not one of those at the supper table had noticed the curious and silent manœuvre, but when the stranger finally closed the door of the coffee-room behind him, they all instinctively sighed a sigh of relief.

'Alone, at last !' said Lord Antony, jovially.

Then the young de Tournay rose, glass in hand, raised it aloft, and said—

‘To His Majesty George the Third of England. God bless him for his hospitality to us all, poor exiles from France.’

‘His Majesty the King!’ echoed Lord Antony and Sir Andrew, as they loyally drank the toast.

‘To His Majesty King Louis of France,’ added Sir Andrew, with solemnity. ‘May God protect him, and give him victory over his enemies.’

Every one rose and drank this toast in silence. The fate of the unfortunate King of France, then a prisoner of his own people, seemed to cast a gloom even over Mr Jellyband’s pleasant countenance.

‘And to the Count de Tournay,’ said Lord Antony, merrily. ‘May we welcome him in England before many days are over.’

‘Oh, Sir,’ said the Countess, as with a slightly trembling hand she conveyed her glass to her lips, ‘I scarcely dare to hope.’

But already Lord Antony had served out the soup, and for the next few moments all conversation ceased, while Jellyband and Sally handed round the plates, and every one began to eat.

‘Faith, Madam!’ said Lord Antony, after a while, ‘mine was no idle toast; seeing yourself and your children safely in England, surely you must feel reassured as to the fate of the Count.’

‘Ah, Sir,’ replied the Countess, with a heavy sigh, ‘I trust in God—I can but pray—and hope. . . .’

‘Aye, Madam!’ here interposed Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, ‘trust in God by all means, but believe also a little in your English friends, who have sworn to bring the Count safely across the Channel, even as they have brought you today.’

‘Indeed, Sir,’ she replied. ‘I have the fullest confidence in you and in your friends. Your fame, I assure you, has spread throughout France. The way some of my own friends have escaped from the clutches of that awful revolutionary tribunal was nothing short of a miracle—and all done by you and your friends——’

‘ We were but the hands, Countess. . . . ’

‘ But my husband, Sir,’ said the Countess, while unshed tears seemed to veil her voice, ‘ he is in such deadly peril—I never would have left him, only there were my children. I was torn between my duty to him and to them. They refused to go without me. And you and your friends assured me so solemnly that my husband would be safe. But, oh ! now that I am here—amongst you all—in this beautiful, free England—I think of him, flying for his life, hunted like a poor beast—in such peril. Ah ! I should not have left him. I should not have left him ! ’

The poor woman had completely broken down ; fatigue, sorrow and emotion had overmastered her rigid, aristocratic bearing. She was crying gently to herself, while Suzanne ran up to her mother and tried to comfort her.

Lord Antony and Sir Andrew had said nothing to interrupt the Countess whilst she was speaking. There was no doubt that they felt deeply for her ; their very silence testified to that. But in every century, and ever since England has been what it is, an Englishman has always felt somewhat ashamed of his own emotion and sympathy. And so the two young men said nothing and busied themselves in trying to hide their feelings, only succeeding in looking sheepish.

‘ As for me, Sir,’ said Suzanne, suddenly, as she looked through a wealth of brown curls across at Sir Andrew, ‘ I trust you absolutely, and I know that you will bring my dear father safely to England, just as you brought us today.’

This was said with so much confidence that it seemed as if by magic to dry the mother’s eyes, and to bring a smile upon everybody’s lips.

‘ Nay ! you shame me, my lady,’ replied Sir Andrew ; ‘ though my life is at your service, I have been but a humble tool in the hands of our great leader, who organized and effected your escape.’ He had spoken with so much warmth and vehemence that Suzanne’s eyes fastened upon him in undisguised wonder.

‘Your leader, Sir?’ said the Countess, eagerly. ‘Ah! of course, you must have a leader. And I did not think of that before! But tell me where is he? I must go to him at once, and I and my children must throw ourselves at his feet, and thank him for all that he has done for us.’

‘Alas, Madam!’ said Lord Antony, ‘that is impossible.’

‘Impossible?—Why?’

‘Because the Scarlet Pimpernel works in the dark, and his identity is only known under a solemn oath of secrecy to his immediate followers.’

‘The Scarlet Pimpernel?’ said Suzanne, with a merry laugh. ‘Why! what a funny name! What is the Scarlet Pimpernel?’

She looked at Sir Andrew with eager curiosity. The young man’s face had become almost transfigured. His eyes shone with enthusiasm; hero-worship, love, admiration for his leader seemed to glow upon his face.

‘The Scarlet Pimpernel,’ he said at last, ‘is the name of a humble English wayside flower; but it is also the name chosen to hide the identity of the best and bravest man in all the world, so that he may better succeed in accomplishing the noble task he has set himself to do.’

‘Ah, yes,’ here interposed the young Count, ‘I have heard speak of this Scarlet Pimpernel. A little flower—red?—yes? They say in Paris that every time a royalist escapes to England, that devil the Public Prosecutor receives a paper with that little flower drawn in red upon it... Yes?’

‘That is so,’ assented Lord Antony.

‘Then he will have received one such paper today?’

‘Undoubtedly.’

‘Oh! I wonder what he will say!’ said Suzanne merrily. ‘I dare say the picture of that little red flower is the only thing that frightens him.’

‘Faith, then,’ said Sir Andrew, ‘he will have many more opportunities of studying the shape of that small scarlet flower.’

‘Ah! Sir,’ sighed the Countess, ‘It all sounds like a romance, and I cannot understand it all.’

‘ Why should you try, Madam ? ’

‘ But tell me, why should your leader—why should you all—spend your money and risk your lives—for it is your lives you risk when you set foot in France—and all for us French men and women, who are nothing to you ? ’

‘ Sport, Countess, sport,’ asserted Lord Antony, with his jovial, loud and pleasant voice ; ‘ we are a nation of sportsmen, you know, and just now it is the fashion to pull the hare from between the teeth of the hound.’

‘ Ah, no, no, not sport only, Sir. You have a more noble motive, I am sure, for the good work you do.’

‘ Faith, Madam, I would like you to find it then ; as for me, I vow, I love the game, for this is the finest sport I have yet encountered. Hair-breadth escapes and the devil’s own risks ! ’

But the Countess shook her head incredulously. To her it seemed absurd that these young men and their great leader, all of them rich, well-born, and young, should, for no other motive than sport, run the terrible risks which she knew they were constantly doing. Their nationality, once they had set foot in France, would be no safeguard to them. Any one found harbouring or assisting suspected royalists would be ruthlessly condemned and summarily executed, whatever his nationality might be. And this band of young Englishmen had, to her own knowledge, bearded the implacable and blood-thirsty tribunal of the Revolution, within the very walls of Paris itself, and had snatched away condemned victims almost from the foot of the guillotine. With a shudder, she recalled the events of the last few days, her escape from Paris with her two children, all three of them hidden beneath the hood of a rickety cart, and lying amidst a heap of turnips and cabbages, not daring to breathe, whilst the mob howled ‘ Death to all aristocrats ’ at that awful West Barricade.

It had all occurred in such a miraculous way : she and her husband had understood that they had been placed on the list of ‘ suspected persons ’, which meant that their trial and death were but a matter of days—of hours

perhaps. Then came the hope of salvation ; the mysterious epistle, signed with the enigmatical scarlet device ; the clear directions ; the parting from the Count, which had torn the poor wife's heart in two ; the hope of reunion ; the flight with her two children ; the covered cart ; that awful hag driving it, who looked like some horrible evil demon, with the ghastly trophy on her whip handle !

' How many are there in your brave league, Sir ? ' Suzanne asked timidly.

' Twenty all told,' he replied, ' one to command and nineteen to obey. All of us Englishmen, and all pledged to the same cause—to obey our leader and to rescue the innocent.'

' May God protect you all, gentlemen,' said the Countess, fervently.

' He has done that so far, Madam.'

' It is wonderful to me, wonderful !—That you should all be so brave, so devoted to your fellow-men—yet you are English !—and in France treachery is rife—all in the name of liberty and fraternity.'

' The women even, in France, have been more bitter against us aristocrats than the men,' said the young Count, with a sigh.

' Ah, yes,' added the Countess, whilst a look of haughty disdain and intense bitterness shot through her melancholy eyes. ' There was that woman, Marguerite St Just, for instance. She denounced the Marquis of St Cyr and all his family to the tribunal.'

' Marguerite St Just ? ' said Lord Antony, as he shot a quick and apprehensive glance across at Sir Andrew. ' Marguerite St Just ?—Surely . . .'

' Yes ! ' replied the Countess, ' surely you know her. She was well known in Paris, and she married an Englishman lately. You must know her——'

' Know her ? ' said Lord Antony. ' Know Lady Blakeney—the most fashionable woman in London—the wife of the richest man in England ? Of course, we all know Lady Blakeney.'

' She was a school-fellow of mine at the convent in

Paris,' interposed Suzanne, ' and we came over to England together to learn your language. I was very fond of Marguerite, and I cannot believe that she ever did anything so wicked.'

' It certainly seems incredible,' said Sir Andrew. ' You say that she actually denounced the Marquis of St Cyr ? Why should she have done such a thing ? Surely there must be some mistake——'

' No mistake is possible, Sir,' rejoined the Countess, coldly. ' Marguerite St Just's brother is a noted republican. There was some talk of a family feud between him and my cousin, the Marquis of St Cyr. The St Justs are quite ordinary folk, and the republican government employs many spies. I assure you there is no mistake. You have not heard this story ? '

' Faith, Madam, I did hear some vague rumours of it, but in England no one would credit it. Sir Percy Blakeney, her husband, is a very wealthy man of high social position, the intimate friend of the Prince of Wales, and Lady Blakeney leads both fashion and society in London.'

' That may be, Sir, and we shall, of course, lead a very quiet life in England, but I pray God that while I remain in this beautiful country I may never meet Marguerite St Just.'

Even as she spoke, a distant clatter was heard of an approaching coach : louder and louder it grew, one or two shouts became distinguishable, then the rattle of horses' hoofs on the uneven cobble stones, and the next moment a stable boy had thrown open the coffee-room door and rushed in excitedly.

' Sir Percy Blakeney and his lady,' he shouted at the top of his voice, ' they're just arriving.'

And with more shouting, jingling of harness, and the noise of iron hoofs upon the stones, a magnificent coach, drawn by four superb bays, had halted outside the porch of ' The Fisherman's Rest '.

CHAPTER IV

MARGUERITE

IN a moment the pleasant oak-raftered coffee-room of the inn became the scene of hopeless confusion and discomfort. At the first announcement, made by the stable boy, Lord Antony jumped up from his seat and was now giving many and confused directions to poor bewildered Jellyband, who seemed at his wits' end what to do. 'For goodness' sake, man,' he said, 'try to keep Lady Blakeney talking outside for a moment while the ladies withdraw. Faith!' he added, 'this is most unfortunate.'

'Quick, Sally! the candles!' shouted Jellyband, as, hopping about from one leg to another, he ran hither and thither, adding to the general discomfort of everybody.

The Countess, too, had risen to her feet; rigid and erect, trying to hide her excitement beneath more becoming calm, she repeated mechanically—'I will not see her!—I will not see her!'

Outside, the excitement attendant upon the arrival of very important guests grew apace.

'Good day, Sir Percy!—Good day to your ladyship! Your servant, Sir Percy!'—was heard in one long, continued chorus, with alternate more feeble tones of—'Remember the poor blind man! of your charity, lady and gentleman!' Then suddenly a singularly sweet voice was heard through all the din. 'Let the poor man be—and give him some supper at my expense.'

The voice was low and musical, with a slight sing-song in it, and a faint trace of foreign accent. Every one in the coffee-room heard it and paused, instinctively listening to it for a moment. Sally was holding the candles by the opposite door, which led to the bedrooms upstairs, and the Countess was in the act of beating a hasty retreat before that enemy who owned such a sweet, musical

voice. Suzanne reluctantly was preparing to follow her mother, while casting regretful glances towards the door, where she hoped still to see her dearly-beloved former school-fellow.

Then Jellyband threw open the door, still stupidly and blindly hoping to avert the catastrophe which he felt was in the air, and the same low, musical voice said, with a merry laugh and mock consternation—‘ B-r-r-r-r ! I am as wet as a herring ! Faith ! has any one ever seen such a contemptible climate ? ’

‘ Suzanne, come with me at once—I wish it,’ said the Countess, sternly.

‘ Oh ! Mama ! ’ pleaded Suzanne.

‘ My lady . . . er . . . h’m ! . . . my lady ! ’ came in feeble accents from Jellyband, who stood clumsily trying to bar the way.

‘ La, my good man,’ said Lady Blakeney, with some impatience, ‘ what are you standing in my way for, dancing about like a turkey with a sore foot ? Let me get to the fire ; I am perished with the cold.’ And the next moment, gently pushing the innkeeper on one side, she had swept into the coffee-room.

There are many portraits and miniatures extant of Marguerite St Just—Lady Blakeney as she was then—but it is doubtful if any of these really do her singular beauty justice. Tall over the average, with magnificent presence and regal figure, it is small wonder that even the Countess paused for a moment in unwilling admiration before turning her back on so fascinating an apparition. Marguerite was then scarcely five-and-twenty and her beauty was at its most dazzling stage. The large hat, with its undulating and waving plumes, threw a soft shadow across the classic brow with the crown of auburn hair ; the sweet childlike mouth, the straight chiselled nose, round chin, and delicate throat, all seemed set off by the picturesque costume of the period. The rich blue velvet robe moulded in its every line the graceful contour of the figure, whilst one tiny hand held, with a dignity all its own, the tall stick adorned with a large bunch of

ribbons which fashionable ladies of the period used to carry.

With a quick glance all round the room, she had taken stock of every one there. She nodded pleasantly to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, whilst extending a hand to Lord Antony.

‘Hello! my Lord Tony, why—what are *you* doing here in Dover?’ she said merrily. Then, without waiting for a reply, she turned and faced the Countess and Suzanne. Her whole face lighted up with additional brightness, as she stretched out both arms towards the young girl.

‘Why! if that isn’t my little Suzanne over there! How came *you* to be in England? And Madam too?’

She went to greet them both, with not a single touch of embarrassment in her manner or in her smile. Lord Tony and Sir Andrew watched the little scene with apprehension. English though they were, they had often been in France, and had mixed sufficiently with the French to realize the unbending pride and bitter hatred with which the old nobility of France viewed all those who had helped to contribute to their downfall. Armand St Just, the brother of beautiful Lady Blakeney—though known to hold moderate views—was an ardent republican: his feud with the ancient family of St Cyr—the rights and wrongs of which no outsider ever knew—had culminated in the downfall, the almost total extinction of the latter. In France, St Just and his party had triumphed, and here in England, face to face with these three refugees driven from their country, fleeing for their lives, bereft of all which centuries of luxury had given them, there stood a fair descendant of those same republican families which had hurled down a throne, and uprooted an aristocracy whose origin was lost in bygone centuries.

She stood there before them, in all her beauty, and stretched out her dainty hand to them, as if she would, by that one act, bridge over the conflict and bloodshed of the past decade.

‘Suzanne, I forbid you to speak to that woman,’ said

the Countess sternly, as she placed a restraining hand upon her daughter's arm.

She had spoken in English, so that all might hear and understand ; the two young English gentlemen as well as the innkeeper and his daughter. The latter gasped with horror at this foreign insolence, this impudence before her ladyship—who was English, now she was Sir Percy's wife, and a friend too of the Princess of Wales. As for Lord Antony and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, their very hearts seemed to stand still with horror at this insult. One of them uttered an exclamation of appeal, the other one of warning, and instinctively both glanced hurriedly towards the door, whence a slow, drawling, not unpleasant voice had already been heard.

Alone amongst those present Marguerite Blakeney and the Countess had remained seemingly unmoved. The latter, stiff, erect and defiant, with one hand still upon her daughter's arm, seemed the very personification of unbending pride. For the moment Marguerite's sweet face had become as white as the lace which swathed her throat, and a very keen observer might have noted that the hand which held the tall, beribboned stick was clenched, and trembled somewhat. But this was only momentary ; the next instant the delicate eyebrows were raised slightly, the lips curved sarcastically upwards, the clear blue eyes looked straight at the rigid Countess, and with a slight shrug of the shoulders—‘Come, come,’ she said gaily, ‘what fly stings you, pray ?’

‘We are in England now, Madam,’ rejoined the Countess, coldly, ‘and I am at liberty to forbid my daughter to touch your hand in friendship.’ She beckoned to her daughter, and without another look at Marguerite Blakeney, but with a deep bow to the two young men, she sailed majestically out of the room.

There was silence in the old inn parlour for a moment, as the rustle of the Countess's skirts died away down the passage. Marguerite, rigid as a statue, followed with hard, set eyes the upright figure, as it disappeared through the doorway—but as little Suzanne, humble and

obedient, was about to follow her mother, the hard, set expression suddenly vanished, and a wistful, almost pathetic and childlike look stole into Lady Blakeney's eyes. Little Suzanne caught that look; the child's sweet nature went out to the beautiful woman, scarce older than herself; filial obedience vanished before girlish sympathy; at the door she turned, ran back to Marguerite, and putting her arms round her, kissed her warmly; then only did she follow her mother.

Suzanne's sweet action had relieved the unpleasant tension. Sir Andrew's eyes followed the pretty little figure, until it had quite disappeared, then they met Lady Blakeney's with unassumed merriment.

Marguerite smiled. 'So that's it, is it?' she said gaily. 'La! Sir Andrew, did you ever see such an unpleasant person? I hope when I grow old I shan't look like that.'

But now a pleasant, though distinctly foolish laugh, was heard from outside, and the next moment an unusually tall and very richly dressed figure appeared in the doorway.

CHAPTER V

A DANDY OF THE DAY

SIR PERCY BLAKENEY, as the chronicles of the time inform us, was then still a year or two on the right side of thirty. Tall above the average, broad-shouldered and massively built, he would have been called unusually good-looking, but for a certain lazy expression in his deep-set blue eyes, and that perpetual foolish laugh which seemed to disfigure his strong, clearly-cut mouth.

It was nearly a year ago now that Sir Percy Blakeney, Baronet, one of the richest men in England, leader of all the fashions, and intimate friend of the Prince of Wales, had astonished fashionable society in London, by bringing home from one of his journeys abroad a beautiful,

fascinating, clever, French wife. He, the sleepiest, dullest, most British Britisher that had ever set a pretty woman yawning, had secured by marriage a brilliant prize for which, as all chroniclers declare, there had been many competitors.

Marguerite St Just had first made her appearance in artistic Parisian circles, at the very moment when the greatest social upheaval the world has ever known was taking place within its very walls. Scarcely eighteen, lavishly gifted with beauty and talent, protected only by a young and devoted brother, she had soon gathered round her a circle which was as brilliant as it was exclusive—exclusive, that is to say, only from one point of view. Marguerite St Just was from principle and by conviction a republican—equality of birth was her motto—inequality of fortune was in her eyes a mere untoward accident, but the only inequality she admitted was that of talent. 'Money and titles may be hereditary,' she would say, 'but brains are not,' and thus her drawing-room was reserved for originality and intellect, for brilliance and wit, for clever men and talented women.

Then the climax came. Some smiled indulgently and called it artistic eccentricity. Others looked upon it as a wise provision, in view of the many events which were crowding thick and fast in Paris just then, but to all, the real motive of that climax remained a mystery. Anyway, Marguerite St Just married Sir Percy Blakeney one fine day, just like that, without any warning to her friends, without any of the formalities of a fashionable French wedding.

How that stupid, dull Englishman ever came to be admitted within the intellectual circle which revolved round 'the cleverest woman in Europe', as her friends unanimously called her, no one ventured to guess—a golden key will open every door, said some. Yet Marguerite St Just cared nothing about money, and still less about a title: there were at least half a dozen other men in the cosmopolitan world equally well-born, if not so wealthy as Blakeney, who would have been happy to

give Marguerite St Just any position she might choose to covet.

As for Sir Percy himself, he was universally voted to be totally unqualified for the part he had taken upon himself. His chief qualifications for it seemed to consist in his blind adoration for her, his great wealth, and the high favour in which he stood at the English court ; but London society thought that, taking into consideration his own intellectual limitations, it would have been wiser on his part, had he bestowed those worldly advantages upon a less brilliant and witty wife.

Although lately he had been so prominent a figure in fashionable English society, he had spent most of his early life abroad. His father, the late Sir Algernon Blakeney, had had the terrible misfortune of seeing an idolized young wife become hopelessly insane after two years of happy married life. Percy had just been born when the late Lady Blakeney fell a prey to the terrible malady which in those days was looked upon as hopelessly incurable and nothing short of a curse of God upon the entire family. Sir Algernon took his afflicted wife abroad, and there Percy was educated, and grew up between an imbecile mother and a distracted father. The death of his parents following close upon one another left him a free man, and as Sir Algernon had led a forcibly simple and retired life, the large Blakeney fortune had increased tenfold.

Sir Percy Blakeney had travelled a great deal abroad, before he brought home his beautiful young French wife. The fashionable circles of the time were ready to receive them both with open arms. Sir Percy was rich, his wife was accomplished ; the Prince of Wales took a very great liking to them both. Within six months they were the acknowledged leaders of fashion. Sir Percy's coats were the talk of the town, his foolish laugh copied by all the stylish young men. Every one knew that he was hopelessly stupid, but then that was scarcely to be wondered at, seeing that all the Blakeneys, for generations, had been notoriously dull and that his mother had died an imbecile.

Thus society accepted him, petted him, made much of

him. As for his marriage with 'the cleverest woman in Europe', well ! the inevitable came with sure and rapid footsteps. No one pitied him, since his fate was of his own making. There were plenty of young ladies in England, of high birth and good looks, who would have been quite willing to help spend the Blakeney fortune, whilst smiling indulgently at his good-humoured foolishness. Moreover, Sir Percy got no pity, because he seemed to require none—he seemed very proud of his clever wife, and to care little that she took no pains to disguise that good-natured contempt which she evidently felt for him, and that she even amused herself by sharpening her ready wits at his expense. Physically, Sir Percy Blakeney was undeniably handsome and was always superbly dressed.

On this special afternoon in September, in spite of the long journey by coach, in spite of rain and mud, his coat hung elegantly from his fine shoulders, his hands looked almost femininely white, as they emerged through frills of finest lace. Certainly in repose one might have admired so fine a specimen of English manhood, until the foppish ways, the affected movements, the perpetual foolish laugh, brought one's admiration of Sir Percy Blakeney to an abrupt close. He had lolled into the inn parlour, shaking the wet off his fine overcoat ; then putting up a gold-rimmed eyeglass to his lazy blue eye, he surveyed the company, upon whom an embarrassed silence had suddenly fallen.

'How do, Tony ! How do, Ffoulkes ?' he said, recognizing the two young men and shaking them by the hand. 'Faith, my dear fellow,' he added, smothering a slight yawn, 'did you ever see such a beastly day ? Cursed climate this.' Then, to the landlord : 'A bowl of punch, Jelly, hot and strong. Hasten, my good Jelly !'

'Nay, there is no time, Sir Percy,' interposed Marguerite. 'The skipper will be here directly and my brother must get on board, or the *Day Dream* will miss the tide.'

'Time, my dear ? There is plenty of time for any

gentleman to drink and get on board before the turn of the tide.'

'I think, your ladyship,' said Jellyband, respectfully, 'that the young gentleman is coming along now with Sir Percy's skipper.'

'That's right,' said Blakeney, 'then Armand can join us in the bowl.'

'You are all such merry company,' said Marguerite, 'that I trust you will forgive me if I bid my brother good-bye in another room.'

They could hardly protest. Both Lord Antony and Sir Andrew felt that Lady Blakeney could not altogether be in tune with them at that moment. Her love for her brother, Armand St Just, was deep and sincere. He had spent a few weeks with her in her English home, and was going back to serve his country, at a moment when death was the usual reward for the most enduring devotion.

CHAPTER VI

THE ACCREDITED AGENT

THE *Day Dream* had set sail, and Marguerite Blakeney stood alone on the edge of the cliff for over an hour, watching those white sails which bore so swiftly away from her the only being who really cared for her, whom she dared to love, whom she knew she could trust.

Away to her left the lights from the coffee-room of 'The Fisherman's Rest' glittered yellow in the gathering mist; from time to time she could catch the sound of merry-making and of jovial talk, or that perpetual, senseless laugh of her husband's, which grated continually upon her sensitive ears. She supposed that, in his own stupid, good-natured way, he might have understood that she wished to remain alone, while those white sails disappeared into the vague horizon, so many miles away.

He, whose notions of propriety were supersensitive, had not suggested even that an attendant should remain within call. Marguerite was grateful to her husband for all this ; she always tried to be grateful to him for his thoughtfulness, which was constant, and for his generosity which really was boundless. She tried even at times to curb the sarcastic, bitter thoughts of him which made her—in spite of herself—say cruel, insulting things, which she vaguely hoped would wound him. Yes ! she often wished to wound him, to make him feel that she held him in contempt, that she had forgotten that once she had almost loved him. Loved that stupid fop, whose thoughts seemed unable to soar beyond the tying of a cravat or the new cut of a coat ! Bah ! And yet came vague memories of the time when first he worshipped her ; he seemed so devoted—a very slave.

Then suddenly that love, that devotion, seemed to vanish completely. Twenty-four hours after the simple little ceremony of their marriage, she had told him the story of how, inadvertently, she had spoken of certain matters connected with the Marquis of St Cyr before some men—her friends—who had used this information against the unfortunate Marquis, and sent him and his family to the guillotine.

She hated the Marquis. Years ago, Armand, her dear brother, had loved Angele St Cyr, but St Just was no nobleman, and the Marquis full of the pride and prejudices of his caste. One day Armand, the respectful, timid lover, ventured on sending a small poem—enthusiastic, ardent, passionate—to the idol of his dreams. The next night he was waylaid just outside Paris by the servants of the Marquis, and thrashed like a dog within an inch of his life—because he had dared to raise his eyes to the daughter of the aristocrat. Marguerite remembered it all : what her brother must have suffered in his manhood and his pride must have been appalling ; what she suffered through him and with him she never attempted even to analyse.

Then the day of retribution came. St Cyr and his kind

had found their masters in those very common folk whom they had despised. Armand and Marguerite, both intellectual thinking beings, adopted with the enthusiasm of their years the Utopian doctrines of the Revolution, while the Marquis of St Cyr and his family fought inch by inch for the retention of those privileges which had placed them socially above their fellow-men. Marguerite, impulsive, thoughtless, not calculating the result of her words, still smarting under the terrible insult her brother had suffered at the Marquis' hands, happened to hear—in her own circle—that the St Cyrs were in treasonable correspondence with Austria, hoping to obtain the Emperor's support to quell the growing revolution in their own country. In those days one denunciation was sufficient : Marguerite's few thoughtless words about the Marquis bore fruit within twenty-four hours. He was arrested. His papers were searched : letters from the Austrian Emperor, promising to send troops against the Paris populace, were found in his desk. He was arrested for treason and sent to the guillotine, and his family, his wife and his sons, shared this awful fate.

Marguerite, horrified at the terrible consequences of her own thoughtlessness, was powerless to save the Marquis : her own circle, the leaders of the revolutionary movement, all proclaimed her as a heroine : and when she married Sir Percy Blakeney, she did not perhaps altogether realize how severely he would look upon the sin which she had so inadvertently committed, and which still lay heavily upon her soul. She made full confession of it to her husband, trusting to his blind love for her, her boundless power over him, to make him soon forget what might have sounded unpleasant to an English ear.

Certainly, at the moment he seemed to take it very quietly ; hardly, in fact, did he appear to understand the meaning of all she said ; but it was a fact that never afterwards could she detect the slightest sign of that love which she once believed had been wholly hers. Now they had drifted quite apart, and Sir Percy seemed to have laid aside his love for her, as he would an ill-fitting

glove. She tried to arouse him by sharpening her ready wit against his dull intellect ; endeavoured to excite his jealousy, if she could not rouse his love ; tried to goad him to self-assertion, but all in vain. He remained the same, always passive, drawling, sleepy ; always courteous, invariably a gentleman : she had all that the world and a wealthy husband could give to a pretty woman. Yet on this beautiful summer's evening, with the white sails of the *Day Dream* finally hidden by the evening shadows, she felt more lonely than a poor tramp who was plodding his way wearily along the rugged cliffs.

With a heavy sigh, Marguerite turned her back upon the sea and cliffs, and walked slowly back towards 'The Fisherman's Rest'. As she drew near, the sound of revelry, of gay, jovial laughter, grew louder and more distinct. She could distinguish Sir Andrew Ffoulkes' pleasant voice, Lord Tony's boisterous guffaws, her husband's occasional, drawling, sleepy comments ; then realizing the loneliness of the road and the fast gathering gloom round her, she quickened her steps.

The next moment she perceived a stranger coming rapidly towards her. Marguerite did not look up ; she was not the least nervous and 'The Fisherman's Rest' was now well within call. The stranger paused when he saw Marguerite coming quickly towards him, and just as she was about to slip past him, he said very quietly :

'Citizeness St Just.'

Marguerite uttered a little cry of astonishment at thus hearing her own familiar maiden name uttered so close to her. She looked up at the stranger, and this time, with a cry of unfeigned pleasure, she put out both her hands towards him.

'Chauvelin,' she exclaimed.

'Himself, citizeness, at your service,' said the stranger.

Marguerite said nothing for a moment or two, as she surveyed with obvious delight the not very attractive little figure before her. Chauvelin was then nearer forty than thirty—a clever, shrewd-looking person, with a curious, fox-like expression in the deep, sunken eyes.

‘ Chauvelin, my friend,’ said Marguerite, with a little sigh of satisfaction, ‘ I am mightily pleased to see you.’

No doubt poor Marguerite St Just, lonely in the midst of her grandeur, and of her fashionable friends, was happy to see a face that brought back memories of that happy time in Paris, when she reigned—a queen—over the intellectual circle of Paris. She did not notice the sarcastic little smile, however, that hovered round the thin lips of Chauvelin.

‘ But tell me,’ she added merrily, ‘ what in the world are you doing here in England ? ’ She had resumed her walk towards the inn, and Chauvelin turned and walked beside her.

‘ I might return the compliment, fair lady,’ he said. ‘ What of yourself ? ’

‘ Oh, I ? ’ she said, with a shrug of the shoulders. ‘ I am merely bored, my friend, that is all.’

‘ You surprise me, citizeness,’ he said quietly, as he took a pinch of snuff.

‘ Do I now ? ’ she retorted gaily. ‘ Faith, my little Chauvelin, I should have thought that, with your penetration, you would have guessed that an atmosphere composed of fogs and virtues would never suit Marguerite St Just.’

‘ Dear me ! is it as bad as that ? ’ he asked, in mock consternation.

‘ Quite,’ she retorted, ‘ and worse.’

‘ Strange ! Now, I thought that a pretty woman would have found English country life peculiarly attractive.’

‘ Yes ! so did I,’ she said with a sigh. ‘ Pretty women,’ she added meditatively, ‘ ought to have a good time in England, since all the pleasant things are forbidden them.’

‘ Quite so ! ’

‘ You’ll hardly believe it, my little Chauvelin,’ she said earnestly, ‘ but I often pass a whole day—a whole day—without encountering a single temptation.’

‘ No wonder,’ retorted Chauvelin, gallantly, ‘ that the cleverest woman in Europe is troubled with boredom.’

She laughed one of her melodious, rippling, childlike

laughs. 'It must be pretty bad, mustn't it?' she said, 'or I should not have been so pleased to see you.'

'And this within a year of a romantic love match!'

'Yes! only a year. That's just the difficulty.'

'Ah! that idyllic folly,' said Chauvelin, with quiet sarcasm, 'did not then survive the lapse of weeks?'

'Idyllic follies never last, my little Chauvelin. They come upon us like childish ailments, and are as easily cured.'

Chauvelin took another pinch of snuff: he seemed very much addicted to the habit, so prevalent in those days. 'No wonder,' he repeated, 'that the most active brain in Europe is troubled with boredom.'

'I was in hopes that you had a prescription against the malady, my little Chauvelin!'

'How can I hope to succeed in that which Sir Percy Blakeney has failed to accomplish?'

'Shall we leave Sir Percy out of the question for the present, my dear friend?' she said drily.

'Oh! my dear lady, pardon me, but that is just what we cannot very well do,' said Chauvelin, while his eyes, keen as those of a fox on the alert, darted a quick glance at Marguerite. 'I have a most perfect prescription against the worst form of boredom, which I would have been happy to submit to you, but——'

'But what?'

'There *is* Sir Percy.'

'What has he to do with it?'

'Quite a good deal, I am afraid. The prescription I offer, fair lady, is called by a very plebeian name—Work!'

'Work?'

Chauvelin looked at Marguerite long and scrutinizingly.

'Will you render France a small service, citizeness?' he asked, with a sudden change of manner, which lent his thin, fox-like face singular earnestness.

'La, man!' she replied flippantly, 'how serious you look all of a sudden. Indeed I do not know if I *would* render France a small service—at any rate, it depends upon the kind of service she—or you—want.'

‘Have you ever heard of the Scarlet Pimpernel, citizeness St Just?’ asked Chauvelin, abruptly.

‘Heard of the Scarlet Pimpernel?’ she retorted with a long merry laugh, ‘Faith, man, we talk of nothing else. We have Scarlet Pimpernel hats; our horses are called “Scarlet Pimpernel”; at the Prince of Wales’ supper party the other night we had a Scarlet Pimpernel sweet. The other day,’ she added gaily, ‘I ordered a blue dress trimmed with green, and, bless me, if even that wasn’t called Scarlet Pimpernel.’

But Chauvelin remained serious and earnest, while she laughed, and his voice, clear, incisive, and hard, was not raised above his breath as he said—‘Then, as you have heard of that enigmatical personage, you must also have guessed, and known, that the man who hides his identity under that strange name, is the most bitter enemy of our republic, of France—of men like Armand St Just.’

‘La!’ she said, with a quaint little sigh, ‘I dare swear he is. France has many bitter enemies these days.’

‘But you, citizeness, are a daughter of France, and should be ready to help her in a moment of deadly peril.’

‘My brother Armand devotes his life to France,’ she retorted proudly; ‘as for me, I can do nothing, here in England.’

‘Yes, you,’ he urged still more earnestly, whilst his thin fox-like face seemed suddenly to have grown impressive and full of dignity, ‘here, in England; you alone can help us. Listen!—I have been sent over here by the Republican Government as its representative. One of my duties here is to find out all about this League of the Scarlet Pimpernel, which has become a standing menace to France, since it is pledged to help our cursed aristocrats—traitors to their country and enemies of the people—to escape from the just punishment they deserve. You know as well as I do, that once they are over here, those traitors try to rouse public feeling against the Republic. They are ready to join with any enemy bold enough to attack France. Now, within last month, scores of them,

some only suspected of treason, others actually condemned have succeeded in crossing the Channel. Their escape in each instance was planned, organized and effected, by this society of young English jackanapes, headed by a man whose brain seems as resourceful as his identity is mysterious. All the most strenuous efforts on the part of my spies have failed to discover who he is ; while the others are the hands, he is the head, who, beneath this strange anonymity, calmly works at the destruction of France. I mean to strike at that head, and for this I want your help—through him afterwards I can reach the rest of the gang. Find that man for me, citizeness ! ' he urged, ' find him for France.'

Marguerite had listened to Chauvelin's impassioned speech without uttering a word, scarcely making a movement, hardly daring to breathe. She had told him before, that this mysterious hero of romance was the talk of the smart set to which she belonged ; already, before this, her heart and her imagination had been stirred by the thought of the brave man who, unknown to fame, had rescued hundreds of lives from a terrible fate. She had but little real sympathy with those haughty French aristocrats, insolent in their pride of caste, of whom the Countess de Tournay was so typical an example ; but, republican and liberal-minded though she was from principle, she hated and loathed the methods which the young Republic had chosen for establishing itself. She had not been in Paris for some months ; the horrors and bloodshed of the Reign of Terror, culminating in the September massacres, had only come across the Channel to her as a faint echo. Her very soul recoiled in horror from these excesses, to which she feared her brother Armand—moderate republican as he was—might become one day a sacrifice.

Then, when first she heard of this band of young English enthusiasts, who, for sheer love of their fellow-men, dragged women and children, old and young men, from a horrible death, her heart had glowed with pride for them, and now, as Chauvelin spoke, her very soul went

out to the gallant and mysterious leader of the reckless little band, who risked his life daily, who gave it freely and without show, for the sake of humanity. Ah! there was a man she might have loved, had he come her way; everything in him appealed to her romantic imagination; his personality, his strength, his bravery, the loyalty of those who served under him in the same noble cause, and, above all, that namelessness which crowned him as if with a halo of romantic glory.

‘Find him for France, citizeness!’

Chauvelin’s voice close to her ear roused her from her dreams. The mysterious hero had vanished, and, not twenty yards away from her, a man was drinking and laughing, to whom she had sworn faith and loyalty. ‘La! man,’ she said with a return of her assumed flippancy, ‘you are astonishing. Where in the world am I to look for him?’

‘You go everywhere,’ whispered Chauvelin persuasively, ‘Lady Blakeney is the centre of social London, so I am told. You see everything, you *hear* everything.’

‘Go easy, my friend,’ retorted Marguerite, drawing herself up to her full height and looking down with some contempt on the small, thin figure before her. ‘You seem to forget that there are six feet of Sir Percy Blakeney and a long line of ancestors to stand between Lady Blakeney and such a thing as you propose.’

‘For the sake of France!’ repeated Chauvelin, earnestly.

‘Tush, man, you talk nonsense; for even if you did know who this Scarlet Pimpernel is, you could do nothing to him—an Englishman!’

‘I’d take my chance of that,’ said Chauvelin, with a dry laugh. ‘At any rate we could send him to the guillotine first to cool his ardour, then, when there was a diplomatic fuss about it, we could apologize—humbly—to the British Government, and, if necessary, pay compensation to the bereaved family.’

‘What you propose is horrible, Chauvelin,’ she said, drawing away from him as from some poisonous insect. ‘Whoever the man may be, he is brave and noble, and

never—do you hear me?—never would I lend a hand to such villainy.'

' You prefer to be insulted by every French aristocrat who comes to this country? '

Chauvelin had taken sure aim when he shot this tiny shaft. Marguerite bit her under lip, for she would not let him see that the shaft had struck home. ' That is beside the question,' she said at last with indifference. ' I can defend myself, but I refuse to do any dirty work for you—or for France. You have other means at your disposal; you must use them, my friend.'

And without another look at Chauvelin, Marguerite Blakeney turned her back on him and walked straight into the inn.

' That is not your last word, citizeness,' said Chauvelin, as a flood of light from the inn lit up her elegant, richly-clad figure. ' We meet in London, I hope! '

' We meet in London,' she said, speaking over her shoulder at him, ' but that is my last word.'

She threw open the coffee-room door and disappeared from his view, but he remained under the porch for a moment or two, taking a pinch of snuff. He had received a rebuke and a snub, but his shrewd, fox-like face looked neither abashed nor disappointed; on the contrary, a curious smile, half sarcastic and wholly satisfied, played around the corners of his thin lips.

CHAPTER VII

THE OUTRAGE

THAT same night Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Antony Dewhurst were comfortably installed in ' The Fisherman's Rest ' coffee-room, before the huge log-fire, which, in spite of the mildness of the evening, had been allowed to burn merrily. The Blakeneys had both returned by coach to London.

‘ I saw the Scarlet Pimpernel alone, for a few moments in Calais,’ said Sir Andrew, ‘ a day or two ago. He crossed over to England two days before we did. He wants you and Hastings to meet him at Calais on the 2nd of next month. Let me see ! that will be next Wednesday.’

‘ Yes.’

‘ It is, of course, the case of the Count de Tournay this time ; a dangerous task, for the Count, whose escape after he had been declared a “ suspect ” by the Committee of Public Safety, was a masterpiece of the Scarlet Pimpernel’s ingenuity, is now under sentence of death. It will be rare sport to get *him* out of France, and you will have a narrow escape, if you get through at all. St Just has actually gone to meet him—of course, no one suspects St Just as yet ; but after that . . . to get them both out of the country ! Faith, it will be a tough job, and tax even the ingenuity of our chief. I hope I may yet have orders to be of the party.’

‘ Have you any special instructions for me ? ’

‘ Yes ! rather more precise ones than usual. It appears that the Republican Government have sent an agent over to England, a man named Chauvelin, who is said to be terribly bitter against our league, and determined to discover the identity of our leader, so that he may have him kidnapped the next time he attempts to set foot in France. This Chauvelin has brought a whole army of spies with him, and until the chief has discovered who they all are, he thinks we should meet as seldom as possible on the business of the league, and on no account should talk to each other in public places for a time. When he wants to speak to us, he will contrive to let us know.’

The two young men were both bending over the fire, for the blaze had died down, and only a red glow from the dying embers cast a lurid light on a narrow semicircle in front of the hearth. The rest of the room lay buried in complete gloom ; Sir Andrew had taken a letter-case from his pocket, and drawn therefrom a paper, which he unfolded, and together they tried to read it by the dim

red firelight. So intent were they upon this, so wrapt up in the business they had so much at heart, so precious was this document which came from the very hand of their adored leader, that they had eyes and ears only for that. They lost count of the sounds around them, of the dropping of crisp ash from the grate, of the monotonous ticking of the clock, of the soft, almost imperceptible rustle of something on the floor beside them. A figure had emerged from under one of the benches ; with snake-like, noiseless movements it crept closer to the two young men, not breathing, only gliding along the floor, in the inky blackness of the room.

‘ You are to read these instructions and commit them to memory,’ said Sir Andrew, ‘ then destroy them.’

He was about to replace the letter-case into his pocket, when a tiny slip of paper fluttered from it, and fell on to the floor. Lord Antony stooped and picked it up.

‘ What’s that ? ’ he asked.

‘ I don’t know,’ replied Sir Andrew.

‘ It dropped out of your pocket just now. It certainly did not seem to be with the other paper.’

‘ Strange !—I wonder when it got there ? It is from the chief,’ he added, glancing at the paper.

Both stooped to try and decipher this last tiny scrap of paper on which a few words had been hastily scrawled, when suddenly a slight noise attracted their attention, which seemed to come from the passage beyond.

‘ What’s that ? ’ said both instinctively. Lord Antony crossed the room towards the door, which he threw open quickly and suddenly ; at that very moment he received a stunning blow between the eyes, which threw him back violently into the room. Simultaneously the crouching, snake-like figure in the gloom had jumped up and hurled itself from behind the unsuspecting Sir Andrew, felling him to the ground.

All this occurred within the short space of two or three seconds, and before either Lord Antony or Sir Andrew had time or chance to utter a cry or to make the faintest struggle, they were seized by two men, a muffler was

quickly tied round the mouth of each, and they were tied to one another back to back, their arms, hands, and legs securely fastened.

A third man had in the meantime quietly shut the door ; he wore a mask and now stood motionless while the others completed their work.

‘ All safe, citizen ! ’ said one of the men, as he took a final survey of the bonds which secured the two young men.

‘ Good ! ’ replied the man at the door. ‘ Now search their pockets and give me all the papers you find.’

This was promptly and quietly done. The masked man, having taken possession of all the papers, listened for a moment or two for any sound within ‘ The Fisherman’s Rest ’. Evidently satisfied that this dastardly outrage had remained unheard, he once more opened the door and pointed down the passage. The four men lifted Sir Andrew and Lord Antony from the ground, and as quietly, as noiselessly as they had come, they bore the two young gallants out of the inn and along the Dover Road into the gloom beyond.

In the coffee-room the masked leader of this daring attempt was quickly glancing through the stolen papers.

‘ Not a bad day’s work on the whole,’ he muttered, as he quietly took off his mask, and his pale, fox-like eyes glittered in the red glow of the fire. ‘ Not a bad day’s work.’

He opened one or two more letters from Sir Andrew Ffoulkes’ letter-case, noted the tiny scrap of paper which the two young men had only just had time to read ; but one letter especially, signed Armand St Just, seemed to give him strange satisfaction.

‘ Armand St Just a traitor after all,’ he murmured. ‘ Now, fair Marguerite Blakeney,’ he added viciously beneath his clenched teeth, ‘ I think that you will help me to find the Scarlet Pimpernel.’

CHAPTER VIII

IN THE OPERA BOX

It was one of the gala nights at the London opera, the first of the autumn season in this memorable year 1792. The house was packed. In Lord Grenville's box, a curious, interesting personality attracted every one's attention ; a thin, small figure with shrewd, sarcastic face, and deep-set eyes, attentive to the music, keenly critical of the audience, dressed in immaculate black, and with dark hair. Lord Grenville—Foreign Secretary of State—paid him marked, though cold, deference. Here and there, dotted about among distinctly English types of beauty, one or two foreign faces stood out in contrast : the haughty aristocratic cast of countenance of the many French royalist exiles who, persecuted by the relentless, revolutionary faction of their country, had found a peaceful refuge in England.

Chauvelin had his eternal snuff-box in his hand, and his keen pale eyes intently fixed upon a box opposite to him, where Marguerite Blakeney sat with her husband.

Marguerite was passionately fond of music. The opera charmed her. The very joy of living was written plainly upon the sweet young face ; it sparkled out of the merry blue eyes and lit up the smile that lurked around the lips. Two days ago the *Day Dream* had returned from Calais, bringing her news that her idolized brother had safely landed, that he thought of her, and would be prudent for her sake. What wonder for the moment that she forgot her troubles, forgot even the lazy, good-humoured nonentity who had made up for his lack of spiritual attainments by lavishing worldly advantages upon her. He had stayed beside her in the box just as long as convention demanded, making way for the Prince of Wales and for the host of admirers who in a continued

procession came to pay homage to the queen of fashion. Sir Percy had strolled away, probably to talk to more congenial friends. Marguerite did not even wonder where he had gone—she cared so little ; she had had a little court round her, but had dismissed them all, wishing to be alone with the music for a brief while. A discreet knock at the door of the box roused her from her enjoyment.

‘Come in,’ she said with some impatience, without turning to look at the intruder. Chauvelin, waiting for his opportunity, had noted that she was alone, and now, without pausing for that impatient ‘Come in’, he quietly slipped into the box, and the next moment was standing behind Marguerite’s chair.

‘A word with you, citizeness,’ he said quietly.

Marguerite turned quickly, in alarm, which was not altogether feigned.

‘La, man ! you frightened me,’ she said with a forced little laugh, ‘your presence is entirely inopportune. I want to listen to the opera, and have no mind for talking.’

‘But this is my only opportunity,’ he said, as quietly and without waiting for permission he drew a chair close behind her—so close that he could whisper in her ear, without disturbing the audience, and without being seen, in the dark background of the box. ‘Lady Blakeney is always so surrounded by her court, that a mere old friend has but very little chance.’

‘Faith, man !’ she said impatiently, ‘you must seek another opportunity then. I am going to Lord Grenville’s ball tonight after the opera. So are you, probably. I’ll give you five minutes then.’

‘Three minutes in the privacy of this box are quite sufficient for me,’ he rejoined placidly, ‘and I think that you would be wise to listen to me.’

Marguerite instinctively shivered. Chauvelin had not raised his voice above a whisper ; he was now quietly taking a pinch of snuff, yet there was something in his attitude, something in those pale, foxy eyes, which seemed to freeze the blood in her veins.

‘Is that a threat?’ she asked at last.

‘Nay, fair lady,’ he said gallantly, ‘only an arrow shot into the air.’

He paused a moment, like a cat which sees a mouse running heedlessly by, ready to spring, yet waiting with that feline sense of enjoyment of mischief about to be done. Then he said quietly—‘Your brother, St Just, is in peril.’

Not a muscle moved in the beautiful face before him. But Chauvelin was a keen observer; he noticed the sudden rigidity of the eyes, the hardening of the mouth, the sharp tension of the beautiful, graceful figure.

‘Well?’ she said suddenly, with feigned unconcern.

‘Well?’ he rejoined placidly.

‘About my brother?’

‘I have news of him for you which, I think, will interest you, but first let me explain. May I?’

The question was unnecessary. He felt, though Marguerite held her head steadily averted from him, that every nerve was strained to hear what he had to say.

‘The other day,’ he said, ‘I asked for your help. France needed it, and I thought I could rely on you, but you gave me your answer. Since then my own affairs and your own social duties have kept us apart, although many things have happened.’

‘To the point, I pray you,’ she said lightly; ‘the music is entrancing, and the audience will get impatient with your talk.’

‘One moment, citizeness. The day on which I had the honour of meeting you at Dover, and less than an hour after I had your final answer, I obtained possession of some papers which revealed another of those subtle schemes for the escape of a batch of French aristocrats—that traitor de Tournay amongst others—all organized by that arch-meddler, the Scarlet Pimpernel. Some of the threads, too, of this mysterious organization have fallen into my hands, but not all, and I want you—nay! you *must* help me to gather them together.’

Marguerite seemed to have listened to him with marked

impatience ; she now shrugged her shoulders and said gaily—‘ Bah, man. Have I not already told you that I care nought about your schemes or about the Scarlet Pimpernel ? And had you not spoken about my brother?’

‘ A little patience, I entreat,’ he continued imperturbably. ‘ Two gentlemen, Lord Antony Dewhurst and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, were at “ The Fisherman’s Rest ” at Dover that same night.’

‘ I know. I saw them there.’

‘ They were already known to my spies as members of that accursed league. It was Sir Andrew Ffoulkes who escorted the Countess de Tournay and her children across the Channel. When the two young men were alone, my spies forced their way into the coffee-room of the inn, gagged and tied the two gallants, seized their papers, and brought them to me.’

In a moment she had guessed the danger. Papers ? Had Armand been imprudent ? The very thought struck her with terror. Still she would not let this man see that she feared him ; she laughed gaily and lightly. ‘ Faith ! your impudence passes belief,’ she said merrily. ‘ Robbery and violence !—in England !—in a crowded inn ! Your men might have been caught in the act ! ’

‘ What if they had ? They are children of France, and have been trained by your humble servant. Had they been caught they would have gone to jail, or even to the gallows, without a word of protest or indiscretion ; at any rate it was well worth the risk. A crowded inn is safer for these little operations than you think, and my men have experience.’

‘ Well ? And those papers ? ’ she asked carelessly.

‘ Unfortunately, though they have given me certain names, certain movements, enough, I think, to thwart their project for the moment, it would only be for the moment, and they still leave me in ignorance of the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel.’

‘ La ! my friend,’ she said, with the same assumed flippancy of manner, ‘ then you are where you were before, aren’t you ? and you can let me enjoy the music.

Faith ! ' she added, smothering an imaginary yawn, ' had you not spoken about my brother ? '

' I am coming to him now. Among the papers there was a letter to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes written by your brother, St Just.'

' Well ? And ? '

' That letter shows him to be not only in sympathy with the enemies of France, but actually a helper, if not a member, of the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel.'

The blow had been struck at last. All along, Marguerite had been expecting it ; she would not show fear ; she was determined to seem unconcerned, even flippant. She wished, when the shock came, to be prepared for it, to have all her wits about her—those wits which had been called the keenest in Europe. Even now she did not flinch. She knew that Chauvelin had spoken the truth ; the man was too earnest, too blindly devoted to the misguided cause he had at heart, too proud of his countrymen, of those makers of revolutions, to stoop to low, purposeless falsehoods. ' La, man ! ' she said, speaking over her shoulder and looking him full and squarely in the face, ' did I not say it was some imaginary plot ? Armand in league with that enigmatic Scarlet Pimpernel ! Armand busy helping those French aristocrats whom he despises ! Faith, the tale does infinite credit to your imagination ! '

' Let me make my point clear, citizeness,' said Chauvelin, with the same unruffled calm. ' I must assure you that St Just is compromised beyond the slightest hope of pardon.'

Inside the box all was silent for a moment or two. Marguerite sat, straight upright, rigid and inert, trying to think, trying to face the situation, to realize what had best be done.

' Chauvelin,' she said at last, quietly and without that touch of bravado which had characterized her attitude all along, ' Chauvelin, my friend, shall we try to understand one another ? It seems that my wits have become rusty by contact with this damp climate. Now, tell me,

you are very anxious to discover the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel, isn't that so ?'

' France's most bitter enemy ; all the more dangerous, as he works in the dark.'

' All the more noble, you mean. Well !—and you would now force me to do some spying work for you in exchange for my brother Armand's safety ?—Is that it ?'

' Fie ! two very ugly words, fair lady,' protested Chauvelin. ' There can be no question of force, and the service which I ask of you, in the name of France, could never be called by the shocking name of spying.'

' At any rate, that is what it is called over here,' she said drily. ' That is your intention, is it not ?'

' My intention is, that you yourself win a free pardon for Armand St Just by doing me a small service.'

' What is it ?'

' Only watch for me tonight,' he said eagerly. ' Listen : among the papers which were found about the person of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes there was a tiny note. See !' he added, taking a tiny scrap of paper from his pocket-book and handing it to her. It was the same scrap of paper which, four days ago, the two young men had been in the act of reading, at the very moment when they were attacked by Chauvelin's men. Marguerite took it mechanically and stooped to read it. There were only two lines, written in a distorted, evidently disguised, handwriting ; she read them half aloud—

' Remember we must not meet more often than is strictly necessary. You have all instructions for the 2nd. If you wish to speak to me again, I shall be at G.'s ball.'

' What does it mean ? ' she asked.

' Look again, and you will understand.'

' There is a device here in the corner, a small red flower.'

' Yes.'

' The Scarlet Pimpernel,' she said eagerly, ' and G.'s ball means Grenville's ball. He will be at Lord Grenville's ball tonight.'

' That is how I too interpret the note,' concluded Chauvelin. ' Lord Antony Dewhurst and Sir Andrew

Ffoulkes, after they were tied and searched by my spies, were carried by my orders to a lonely house on the Dover Road, which I had rented for the purpose : there they remained close prisoners until this morning. But having found this tiny scrap of paper, my intention was that they should be in London in time to attend Lord Grenville's ball. You see—do you not ?—that they must have a great deal to say to their chief, and thus they will have an opportunity of speaking to him tonight, just as he directed them to do. Therefore, this morning, those two gallants found every bar and bolt open in that lonely house on the Dover Road, their jailers disappeared, and two good horses standing ready saddled and tethered in the yard. I have not seen them yet, but I think we may safely conclude that they did not draw rein until they reached London. Now you see how simple it all is !'

' It does seem simple, doesn't it ? ' she said, with a final bitter attempt at flippancy, ' when you want to kill a chicken, you take hold of it, then you wring its neck. It's only the chicken who does not find it quite so simple. Now you hold a knife at my throat, and a hostage for my obedience. You find it simple. I don't.'

' Nay, I offer you a chance of saving the brother you love from the consequences of his own folly.'

Marguerite's face softened, her eyes at last grew moist, as she murmured, half to herself—' The only being in the world who has loved me truly and constantly. But what do you want me to do, Chauvelin ? ' she said, with a world of despair in her tear-choked voice. ' In my present position, it is well nigh impossible ! '

' Nay,' he said drily and relentlessly, not heeding that despairing, childlike appeal, which might have melted a heart of stone ; ' as Lady Blakeney, no one suspects you, and with your help tonight I may—who knows ?—succeed in finally establishing the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel. You are going to the ball. Watch for me there. Watch and listen. You can tell me if you hear a chance word or whisper. You can note every one to whom Sir Andrew Ffoulkes or Lord Antony Dewhurst will speak.

You are absolutely beyond suspicion now. The Scarlet Pimpernel will be at Lord Grenville's ball tonight. Find out who he is, and I will pledge the word of France that your brother shall be safe.'

Chauvelin was putting the knife to her throat. Marguerite felt herself entangled in a web from which she could hope for no escape. A precious hostage was being held for her obedience: for she knew that this man would never make an empty threat. No doubt Armand was already signalled to the Committee of Public Safety as one of the 'suspect'; he would not be allowed to leave France again, and would be ruthlessly struck, if she refused to obey Chauvelin. For a moment—woman like—she still hoped to temporize. She held out her hand to this man, whom she now feared and hated.

'If I promise to help you in this matter, Chauvelin,' she said pleasantly, 'will you give me that letter of St Just's?'

'If you render me useful assistance tonight,' he replied with a sarcastic smile, 'I will give you that letter—tomorrow.'

'You do not trust me?'

'I trust you absolutely, dear lady, but St Just's life is forfeit to his country. It rests with you to redeem it.'

'I may be powerless to help you,' she pleaded, 'were I ever so willing.'

'That would be terrible indeed,' he said quietly, 'for you—and for St Just.'

Marguerite shuddered. She felt that from this man she could expect no mercy. All-powerful, he held the beloved life in the hollow of his hand. She knew him too well not to know that, if he failed in gaining his own ends, he would be pitiless.

She felt cold in spite of the oppressive air of the opera house. The heart-appealing strains of the music seemed to reach her as from a distant land. She drew her costly lace scarf up around her shoulders, and sat silently watching the brilliant scene, as if in a dream.

CHAPTER IX

THE SCRAP OF PAPER

AT Lord Grenville's ball which followed, Marguerite still suffered intensely. Though she laughed and chatted, though she was more admired and surrounded than any woman there, she felt like one condemned to death, living her last day upon this earth.

Her nerves were in a state of painful tension, which had increased a hundredfold during that brief hour which she had spent in her husband's company between the opera and the ball. Her hope—that she might find in this good-natured lazy individual a valuable friend and adviser—had vanished as quickly as it had come, the moment she found herself alone with him. The same feeling of good-humoured contempt which one feels for an animal or a faithful servant made her turn away with a smile from the man who should have been her moral support in this heart-rending crisis through which she was passing: who should have been her cool-headed adviser when feminine sympathy and sentiment tossed her hither and thither, between her love for her brother, who was far away in mortal peril, and horror of the awful service which Chauvelin had exacted from her, in exchange for Armand's safety.

Later on in the evening she caught sight of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Antony Dewhurst, who seemingly had just arrived. She noticed that Sir Andrew immediately made for little Suzanne de Tournay, and that the two young people soon managed to isolate themselves in one of the deep window-seats, there to carry on a long conversation, which seemed very earnest and very pleasant on both sides.

Both the young men looked a little haggard and

anxious, but otherwise there was not the slightest sign, either in their dress or demeanour, of the terrible catastrophe which they must have felt hovering round them and round their chief.

That the League of the Scarlet Pimpernel had no intention of abandoning its cause, she had gathered through little Suzanne herself, who spoke openly of the assurance she and her mother had had that the Count de Tournay would be rescued from France by the league within the next few days. Vaguely she began to wonder, as she looked at the brilliant and fashionable crowd in the gaily-lighted ballroom, which of these worldly men round her was the mysterious Scarlet Pimpernel, who held the threads of such daring plots, and the fate of valuable lives in his hand. He was at the ball, of course, somewhere, since Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and Lord Antony Dewhurst were here, evidently expecting to meet their chief—and perhaps to get fresh instructions from him.

She watched Sir Andrew now as he strolled towards the doorway, which led to a small room beyond, then paused and leaned against the framework of it, looking anxiously all round him. Marguerite contrived for the moment to evade her present companion, and skirted the fashionable crowd, drawing nearer to the doorway against which Sir Andrew was leaning. Suddenly she stopped: her very heart seemed to stand still, her eyes, large and excited, flashed for a moment towards that doorway, then as quickly were turned away again. Sir Andrew Ffoulkes was still in the same listless position by the door, but Marguerite had distinctly seen that Lord Hastings—a young friend of her husband's and one of the Prince's set—had, as he quickly brushed past him, slipped something into his hand.

For one moment longer Marguerite paused: the next she had, with admirably played unconcern, resumed her walk across the room—but this time more quickly towards that doorway through which Sir Andrew had now disappeared. All this, from the moment that Marguerite had caught sight of Sir Andrew leaning

against the doorway, until she followed him into the little room beyond, had occurred in less than a minute.

Marguerite had now forgotten everything save that Armand stood in peril of his life, and that there, not twenty feet away from her, in the small room which was quite deserted, in the very hands of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, might be the talisman which would save her brother's life.

Barely another thirty seconds had elapsed between the moment when Lord Hastings slipped the mysterious 'something' into Sir Andrew's hand, and the one when she, in her turn, reached the deserted room. Sir Andrew was standing with his back to her and close to a table upon which stood a massive silver candlestick. A slip of paper was in his hand, and he was in the very act of reading it.

Unperceived, her soft clinging robe making not the slightest sound upon the heavy carpet, not daring to breathe until she had accomplished her purpose, Marguerite slipped close behind him. At that moment he looked round and saw her. She uttered a groan, passed her hand across her forehead, and murmured faintly—

'The heat in the room was terrible. I felt so faint.' She tottered almost as if she would fall, and Sir Andrew, quickly recovering himself, and crumpling in his hand the tiny note he had been reading, was only, apparently, just in time to support her.

'You are ill, Lady Blakeney?' he asked with much concern. 'Let me . . .'

'No, no, nothing—' she interrupted quickly. 'A chair, quick.'

She sank into a chair close to the table, and throwing back her head, closed her eyes.

'There!' she murmured, still faintly; 'the giddiness is passing off. . . . Do not heed me, Sir Andrew; I assure you I already feel better.'

Marguerite could not see, for her eyes were closed; she could not hear, for the noise from the ballroom drowned the soft rustle of that momentous scrap of paper; nevertheless she knew—as if she had both seen and heard—that Sir Andrew was even now holding the paper to

the flame of one of the candles. At the exact moment that it began to catch fire, she opened her eyes, raised her hand and, with two dainty fingers, had taken the burning scrap of paper from the young man's hand. Then she blew out the flame, and held the paper to her nostril with perfect unconcern.

'How thoughtful of you, Sir Andrew,' she said gaily, 'surely it was your grandmother who taught you that the smell of burnt paper was a sovereign remedy against giddiness.'

She sighed with satisfaction, holding the paper tightly between her jewelled fingers ; that talisman which perhaps would save her brother Armand's life. Sir Andrew was staring at her, too dazed for the moment to realize what had actually happened ; he had been taken so completely by surprise, that he seemed quite unable to grasp the fact that the slip of paper, which she held in her dainty hand, was one perhaps on which the life of his comrade might depend.

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Marguerite burst into a long, merry peal of laughter. 'Why do you stare at me like that ?' she said playfully. 'I assure you I feel much better ; your remedy has proved most effectual. This room is most delightfully cool,' she added, with the same perfect composure, 'and the sound of the music from the ballroom is fascinating and soothing.'

She was prattling on in the most unconcerned and pleasant way, whilst Sir Andrew, in an agony of mind, was racking his brains as to the quickest method he could employ to get the bit of paper out of that beautiful woman's hand. Instinctively, vague and tumultuous thoughts rushed through his mind : he suddenly remembered her nationality, and, worst of all, recollected that horrible tale about the Marquis of St Cyr, which in England no one had credited, for the sake of Sir Percy, as well as for her own.

'What ? Still dreaming and staring ?' she said, with a merry laugh, 'you are most ungallant, Sir Andrew ; and now I come to think of it, you seemed more startled than

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pleased when you saw me just now. I do believe, after all, that it was not concern for my health, nor yet a remedy taught you by your grandmother that caused you to burn this tiny scrap of paper. I vow it must have been your lady love's last cruel letter you were trying to destroy. Now confess ! ' she added, playfully holding up the scrap of paper, ' does this contain her final dismissal, or a last appeal ? '

' Whichever it is, Lady Blakeney,' said Sir Andrew, who was gradually recovering his self-possession, ' this little note is undoubtedly mine, and . . . '

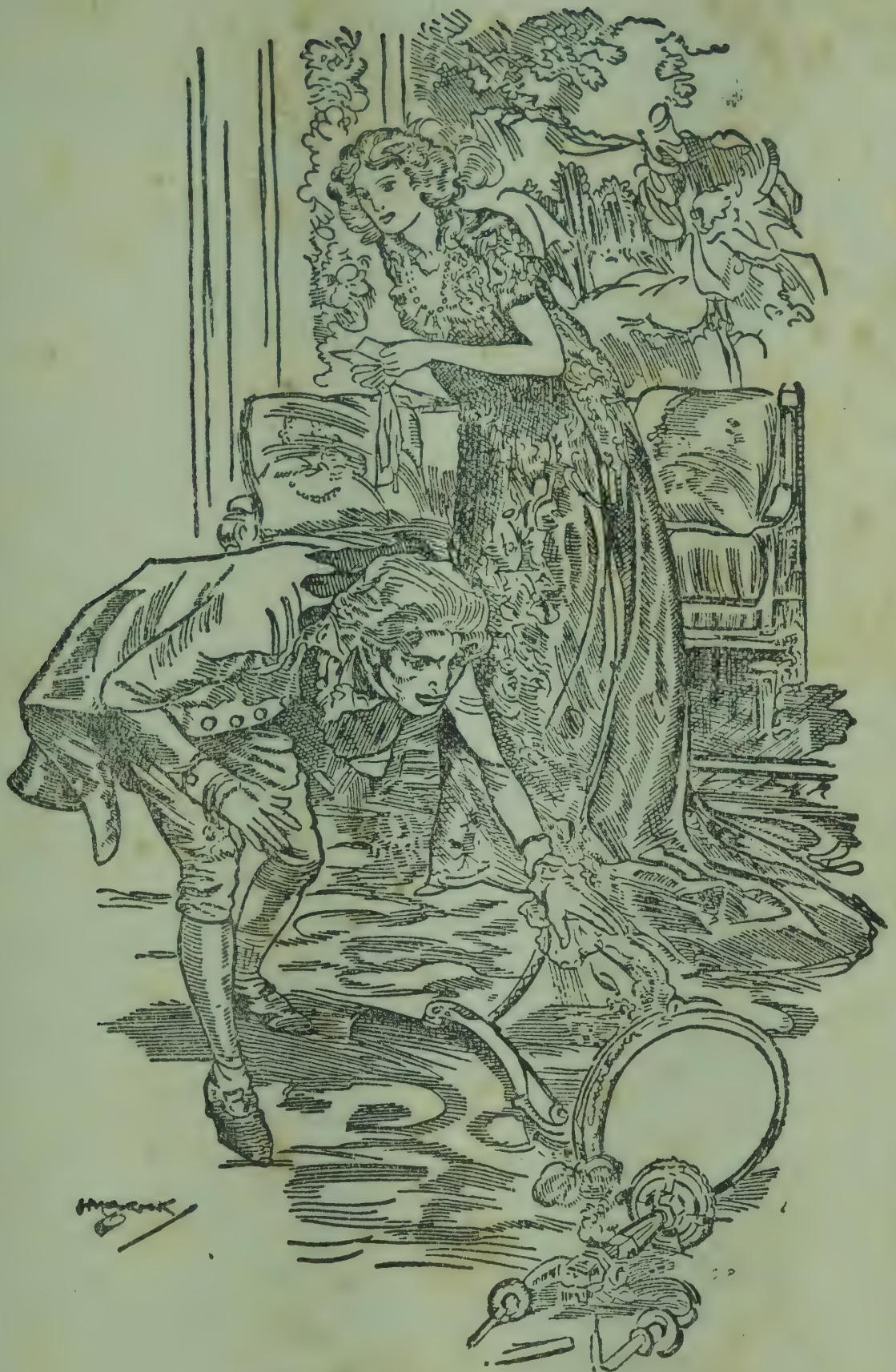
Not caring whether his action was one that would be styled ill-bred towards a lady, the young man made a bold dash for the note. But Marguerite's thoughts flew quicker than his own. She took a quick step backwards and knocked over the small table which was already top-heavy, and which fell with a crash, together with the massive candlestick upon it. She gave a quick cry of alarm—

' The candles, Sir Andrew—quick ! '

There was not much damage done ; one or two of the candles had blown out ; others had merely spilt some grease upon the valuable carpet ; one had set alight the paper shade over it. Sir Andrew quickly and dexterously put out the flames and replaced the candlestick on the table ; but this had taken him a few seconds to do, and those seconds had been all that Marguerite needed to cast a quick glance at the paper, and to note its contents—a dozen words in the same distorted handwriting she had seen before, and bearing the same device—a star-shaped flower drawn in red ink.

When Sir Andrew once more looked at her, he only saw on her face alarm at the accident and relief at its happy issue ; while the tiny and momentous note had apparently fluttered to the ground. Eagerly the young man picked it up, and his face looked much relieved as his fingers closed tightly over it.

' For shame, Sir Andrew,' she said, shaking her head with a playful sigh, ' making havoc in the heart of some



CAST A QUICK GLANCE AT THE PAPER

impressionable duchess, whilst conquering the affections of my sweet little Suzanne.'

' You will forgive me, Lady Blakeney,' said Sir Andrew, now as calm as she was herself, ' if I resume the interesting occupation which you had interrupted ? '

' By all means, Sir Andrew ! Burn your love-token ! And now, Sir Andrew,' said Marguerite, with the most winning of smiles, ' will you venture to excite the jealousy of your fair lady by asking me to dance ? '

CHAPTER X

WORDS OF FATE

THE few words which Marguerite Blakeney had managed to read on the half-scorched piece of paper seemed to her to be the words of Fate. ' Start myself tomorrow. . . ' This she had read quite distinctly ; then came a blur caused by the smoke of the candle, which blotted out the next few words ; but, right at the bottom, there was another sentence, which was now standing clearly and distinctly, like letters of fire, before her mental vision. ' If you wish to speak to me again, I shall be in the supper-room at one o'clock precisely.' The whole was signed with the hastily scrawled little device—a tiny star-shaped flower—which had become so familiar to her.

One o'clock precisely ! It was now close upon eleven, the last dance was being danced, with Sir Andrew Ffoulkes and beautiful Lady Blakeney leading the couples. Marguerite noted—with that acute sense of hers—that she had succeeded in completely allaying Sir Andrew's fears. When the dance was over, she asked Sir Andrew to take her into the next room.

' I have promised to go down to supper with the Prince,' she said, ' but before we part, tell me—am I forgiven ? '

' Forgiven ? '

'Yes! Confess, I gave you a fright just now. But, remember, I am not an Englishwoman, and I do not look upon the exchanging of love-letters as shameful, and I vow I will not tell little Suzanne. But now, shall I welcome you at my party on Wednesday?'

'I am not sure, Lady Blakeney,' he replied evasively. 'I may have to leave London tomorrow.'

'I would not do that, if I were you,' she said earnestly; then seeing the anxious look once more reappearing in his eyes, she added gaily: 'No one can throw a ball better than you can, Sir Andrew; we should so miss you on the bowling-green.'

He had led her across the room to one beyond, where already His Royal Highness was waiting for the beautiful Lady Blakeney.

'Madam, supper awaits us,' said the Prince, offering his arm to Marguerite, 'and I am full of hope. The goddess Fortune has frowned so persistently on me at cards, that I look with confidence for the smiles of the goddess of Beauty.'

'Your Highness has been unlucky?' asked Marguerite, as she took the Prince's arm.

'Aye! most unlucky. Blakeney, not content with being the richest among my father's subjects, has also the most outrageous luck. By the way, where is that inimitable wit? I vow, Madam, that this life would be but a dreary desert without your smiles and his jests.'

CHAPTER XI

ONE O'CLOCK PRECISELY!

SUPPER had been extremely gay. All those present declared that never had Lady Blakeney been more adorable nor that 'idiot', Sir Percy, more amusing. His Royal Highness had laughed until the tears streamed down his cheeks at Blakeney's foolish yet funny repartees.

Marguerite was in her most brilliant mood, and surely not a soul in that crowded supper-room had even an inkling of the terrible struggle which was raging within her heart.

The clock was ticking mercilessly on. It was long past midnight, and even the Prince of Wales was thinking of leaving the supper-table. Within the next half-hour the destinies of two brave men would be pitted against one another—the dearly-beloved brother and the unknown hero.

After supper, dancing was resumed. His Royal Highness then left, and there was general talk of departing among the older guests; the young ones were indefatigable and had started another dance, which would fill the next quarter of an hour. Marguerite did not feel equal to this; there is a limit to the most enduring self-control. Escorted by a Cabinet Minister, she had once more found her way to the little room, still the most deserted of them all. She knew Chauvelin must be lying in wait for her somewhere, ready to seize the first possible opportunity for a talk. Suddenly she saw his keen, fox-like face peeping through the curtained doorway.

‘Lord Fancourt,’ she said to the Minister, ‘will you do me a kindness?’

‘I am entirely at your ladyship’s service,’ he replied gallantly.

‘Will you see if my husband is still in the card-room? And if he is, will you tell him that I am very tired, and would be glad to go home soon?’

Lord Fancourt prepared to obey instantly. ‘I do not like to leave your ladyship alone,’ he said.

‘Never fear. I shall be quite safe here—and, I think, undisturbed. But I am really tired. You know Sir Percy will drive back to Richmond. It is a long way, and we shall not—if we do not hurry—get home before daybreak.’ Lord Fancourt had perforce to go.

The moment he had disappeared, Chauvelin slipped into the room, and the next instant stood calm and impassive by her side. ‘You have news for me?’ he said.

'Nothing of importance,' she said, staring mechanically before her, 'but it might prove a clue. I contrived—no matter how—to detect Sir Andrew Foulkes in the very act of burning a paper at one of these candles, in this very room. That paper I succeeded in holding between my fingers for the space of two minutes, and to cast my eyes on it for that of ten seconds.'

'Time enough to learn its contents?' asked Chauvelin quietly.

She nodded. Then she continued in the same even, mechanical tone—'In the corner of the paper there was the usual rough device of a small star-shaped flower. Above it I read two lines; everything else was scorched and blackened by the flame.'

'And what were these two lines?'

Her throat seemed suddenly to have contracted. For an instant she felt that she could not speak the words which might send a brave man to his death.

'It is lucky that the whole paper was not burned,' added Chauvelin, with dry sarcasm, 'for it might have fared ill with Armand St Just. What were the two lines?'

'One was, "I start myself tomorrow,"' she said quietly; 'the other—"If you wish to speak to me, I shall be in the supper-room at one o'clock precisely."'

Chauvelin looked up at the clock just above the mantelpiece. 'Then I have plenty of time,' he said placidly.

'What are you going to do?' she asked. She was pale as a statue; her hands were icy cold; her head and heart throbbed with the awful strain upon her nerves. Oh, this was cruel! cruel! What had she done to have deserved all this? Her choice was made: had she done a vile action or one that was sublime?

'Oh, nothing for the present. After that it will depend.'

'On what?'

'On whom I shall see in the supper-room at one o'clock.'

‘ You will see the Scarlet Pimpernel, of course. But you do not know him.’

‘ No. But I shall presently.’

‘ Sir Andrew will have warned him.’

‘ I think not. When you parted from him after the dance he stood and watched you for a moment or two, with a look which gave me to understand that something had happened between you. It was only natural—was it not?—that I should make a shrewd guess as to the nature of that “something”. I thereupon engaged the young gallant in a long and animated conversation until a lady claimed his arm for supper.’

‘ Since then?’

‘ I did not lose sight of him through supper. When we all came upstairs again, Lady Portarles buttonholed him and started on the subject of pretty Suzanne de Tournay. I knew he would not move until Lady Portarles had exhausted the subject, which will not be for another quarter of an hour at least, and it is five minutes to one now.’

He was preparing to go, and went up to the doorway, where, drawing aside the curtain, he stood for a moment pointing out to Marguerite the distant figure of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes in close conversation with Lady Portarles.

‘ I think,’ he said, with a triumphant smile, ‘ that I may safely expect to find the person I seek in the dining-room, fair lady.’

‘ There may be more than one.’

‘ Whoever is there, as the clock strikes one, will be shadowed by one of my men; of these, one, or perhaps two, or even three, will leave for France tomorrow. *One* of these will be the Scarlet Pimpernel.’

‘ Yes?—And?’

‘ I also, fair lady, will leave for France tomorrow. The papers found at Dover upon the person of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes speak of the neighbourhood of Calais, of an inn which I know well, called “The Grey Cat”, of a lonely place somewhere on the coast—the old Blanchard’s hut—which I must try to find. All these places are given as

the point where this meddlesome Englishman has bidden the traitor de Tournay and others to meet his men. But it seems that he has decided not to send his men, that "he will start himself tomorrow". Now, one of those persons whom I shall see in the supper-room will be journeying to Calais, and I shall follow that person, until I have tracked him to where those fugitive aristocrats await him; for that person, fair lady, will be the man whom I have sought for nearly a year, the man whose energy has outdone me, whose ingenuity has baffled me, whose audacity has set me wondering—yes! me!—who have seen a trick or two in my time—the mysterious and elusive Scarlet Pimpernel.'

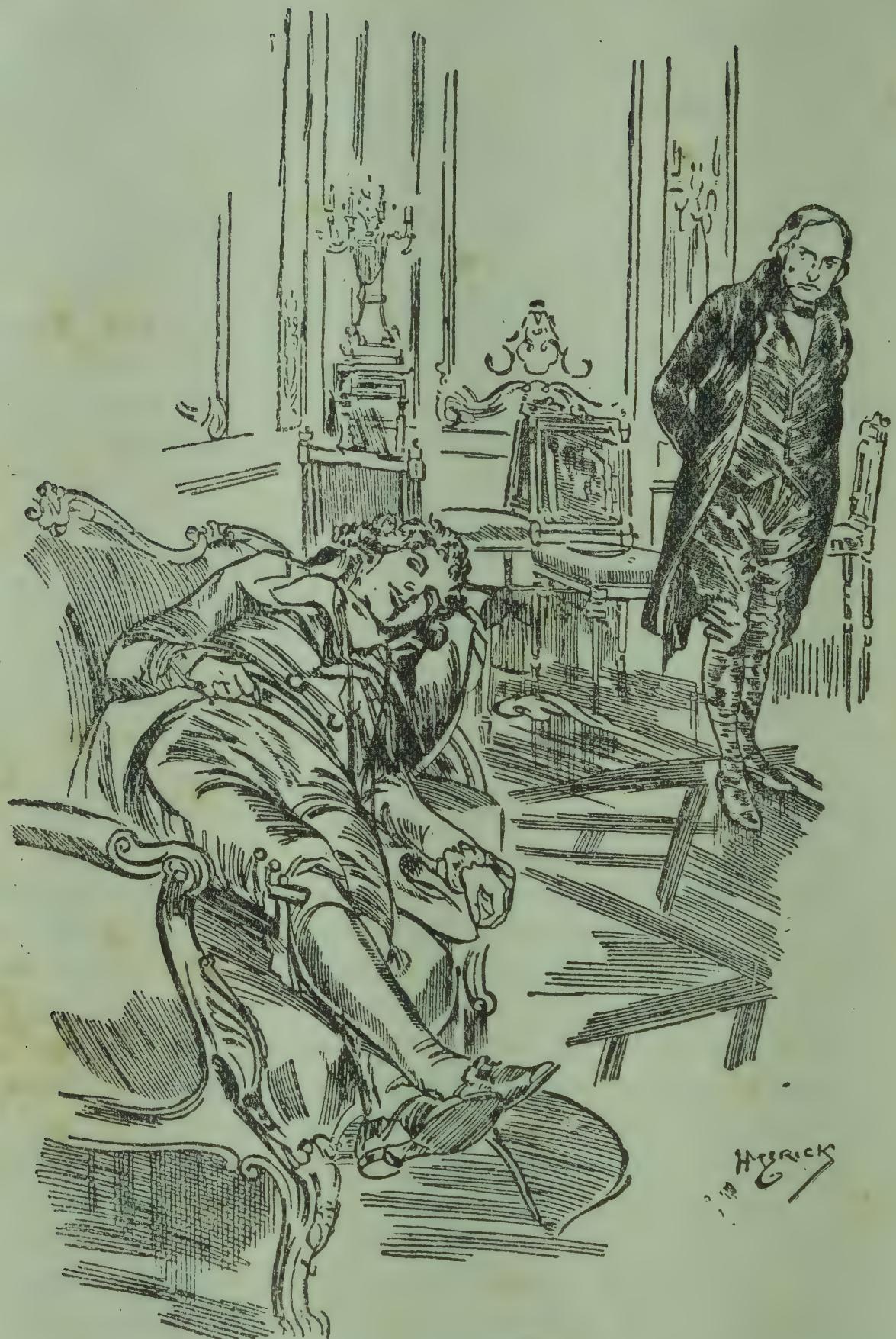
'And Armand?' she pleaded.

'Have I ever broken my word? I promise you that the day the Scarlet Pimpernel and I start for France, I will send you that imprudent letter of his by special messenger. More than that, I will pledge you the word of France, that the day I lay hands on that meddlesome Englishman, St Just will be here in England, safe in the arms of his charming sister.' And with a deep and elaborate bow and another look at the clock, Chauvelin glided out of the room.

When Chauvelin reached the supper-room it was quite deserted. He smiled benignly, and looked round, rubbing his long, thin hands together. Even the last servant had retired in order to join his friends in the hall below. This would make his task all the easier, when presently that unsuspecting enigma would enter it alone. No one was here now save Chauvelin himself.

Stay! as he surveyed with a satisfied smile the solitude of the room, the cunning agent of the French Government became aware of the peaceful, monotonous breathing of some one of Lord Grenville's guests, who, no doubt, had supped both wisely and well, and was enjoying a quiet sleep, away from the din of the dancing above.

Chauvelin looked round once more, and there, in the corner of a sofa, in the dark angle of the room, his mouth open, his eyes shut, the sweet sounds of peaceful slumbers



CHAUVELIN LOOKED AT HIM AS HE LAY THERE PLACID, UNCONSCIOUS

proceeding from his nostrils, reclined the gorgeously-apparelled, long-limbed husband of the cleverest woman in Europe.

Chauvelin looked at him as he lay there, placid, unconscious, at peace with all the world and himself, after the best of suppers, and a smile, that was almost one of pity, softened for a moment the hard lines of the Frenchman's face and the sarcastic twinkle of his pale eyes.

Evidently the slumberer, deep in dreamless sleep, would not interfere with Chauvelin's trap for catching that cunning Scarlet Pimpernel. Again he rubbed his hands together, and, following the example of Sir Percy Blakeney, he too stretched himself out in the corner of another sofa, shut his eyes, opened his mouth, gave forth sounds of peaceful breathing, and . . . waited!

CHAPTER XII

FAREWELL

NEXT morning, when Marguerite reached her room at home in Richmond, she found her maid terribly anxious about her. 'Your ladyship will be so tired,' said the poor woman, whose own eyes were half closed with sleep. 'It is past five o'clock.'

'Ah, yes, Louise, I dare say I shall be tired presently,' said Marguerite, kindly; 'but you are very tired now, so go to bed at once. I'll get into bed alone.'

When the maid was gone, Marguerite drew aside the curtains and threw open the windows. The garden and the river beyond were flooded with rosy light. Far away to the east, the rays of the rising sun had changed the rose into vivid gold. Marguerite looked down upon the terrace where she had stood a few moments ago with the man whose love once had been wholly hers, but yet was hers no longer. It was strange that after all her anxiety for Armand, she was mostly conscious at the present

moment of a keen and bitter heartache. How strange it all was ! How near her husband she had felt during the long drive from the ball ! How sympathetic he had for once appeared, and even tender ! It seemed she loved him still, that she had never ceased to love him ; that deep down in her heart she had always vaguely felt that his foolish talk, his empty laugh, his lazy ways, were nothing but a mask ; that the real man, strong, passionate, wilful, was there still—the man she had loved, whose intensity had fascinated her, whose personality attracted her, since she always felt that behind his apparently slow wits there was a certain something, which he kept hidden from all the world, and most especially from her. Did Marguerite Blakeney, ‘the cleverest woman in Europe’, really love a fool ? Was it love that she had felt for him a year ago when she married him ?

The most contradictory thoughts and emotions took possession of her mind. Absorbed in them, she allowed time to slip by ; perhaps, tired out with long excitement, she had actually closed her eyes and sunk into a troubled sleep, wherein quickly fleeting dreams seemed but the continuation of her anxious thoughts—when suddenly she was roused, from dream or meditation, by the noise of footsteps outside her door.

Nervously she jumped up and listened : the house itself was still ; the footsteps had retreated. Through her wide-open windows the rays of the morning sun were flooding her room with light. She looked up at the clock ; it was half-past six—too early for any of the household to be astir. .

She certainly must have dropped asleep, quite unconsciously. The noise of the footsteps—what could they be ? Gently, on tip-toe, she crossed the room and opened the door to listen ; not a sound—that peculiar stillness of the early morning, when sleep with all mankind is at its heaviest. But the noise made her nervous, and when, suddenly at her feet, on the very doorstep, she saw something white lying there—a letter evidently—she hardly dared touch it. It seemed so ghostlike. It

certainly was not there when she came upstairs ; had Louise dropped it ?

At last she stooped to pick it up, and, amazed, puzzled beyond measure, she saw that the letter was addressed to herself in her husband's large, business-like hand. What could he have to say to her, in the middle of the night, which could not be put off until the morning ? She tore open the envelope and read—

‘ A most unforeseen circumstance forces me to leave for the north immediately, so I beg your ladyship's pardon if I do not avail myself of the honour of bidding you good-bye. My business may keep me employed for about a week, so I shall not have the privilege of being present at your ladyship's party on Wednesday. I remain, your ladyship's most humble and obedient servant,

PERCY BLAKENEY.’

Marguerite stood on the landing, turning over and over in her hand this curt and mysterious epistle, her mind a blank, her nerves strained with agitation and a presentiment she could not very well have explained. Sir Percy owned considerable property in the north, certainly, and he had often before gone there alone and stayed away a week at a time ; but it seemed so very strange that circumstances should have arisen between five and six o'clock in the morning that compelled him to start in this extreme hurry.

Vainly she tried to shake off an unaccustomed feeling of nervousness ; she was trembling from head to foot. A wild, unconquerable desire seized her to see her husband again, at once, if only he had not already started. Forgetting the fact that she was only very lightly clad in a morning wrap, and that her hair lay loosely about her shoulders, she fled down the stairs, right through the hall towards the front door.

It was as usual barred and bolted, for the indoor servants were not yet up ; but her keen ears had detected the sound of voices and the pawing of a horse's hoof against the flagstones. With nervous, trembling fingers

Marguerite undid the bolts one by one, bruising her hands and hurting her nails, for the locks were heavy and stiff. But she did not care ; her whole frame shook with anxiety at the very thought that she might be too late ; that he might have gone without her seeing him and bidding him 'God-speed !'.

At last, she had turned the key and thrown open the door. Her ears had not deceived her. A groom was standing close by holding a couple of horses ; one of these was Sultan, Sir Percy's favourite and swiftest horse, saddled ready for a journey. The next moment Sir Percy himself appeared round the farther corner of the house and came quickly towards the horses. He had changed his gorgeous ball costume, but was as usual superbly dressed in a suit of fine cloth, with high top-boots and riding breeches.

Marguerite went forward a few steps. He looked up and saw her. A slight frown appeared between his eyes.

' You are going ? ' she said quickly and feverishly. ' Where ? '

' As I have had the honour of informing your ladyship, urgent, most unexpected business calls me to the north this morning,' he said, in his usual cold, drawling manner.

' But your guests tomorrow ? '

' I pray your ladyship to offer my humble excuses to His Royal Highness. You are such a perfect hostess, I do not think that I shall be missed.'

' But surely you might have waited for your journey until after our party,' she said, still speaking quickly and nervously. ' Surely the business is not so urgent ? '

' My business, as I had the honour to tell you, Madam, is as unexpected as it is urgent. May I therefore crave your permission to go ? Can I do aught for you in town—or on my way back ? '

' No ; no ; thanks ; nothing. But you will be back soon ? '

' Very soon.'

' Before the end of the week ? '

' I cannot say.' He was evidently trying to get away,

whilst she was straining every nerve to keep him back for a moment or two.

‘Percy,’ she said, ‘will you not tell me why you go today? Surely I, as your wife, have the right to know. You have *not* been called away to the north. I know it. There were no letters from there before we left for the opera last night, and nothing was waiting for you when we returned from the ball. You are *not* going to the north, I feel convinced. There is some mystery, and . . .’

‘Nay, there is no mystery, Madam,’ he replied, with a slight tone of impatience. ‘My business has to do with Armand—there! Now, have I your leave to depart?’

‘With Armand? But you will run no danger?’

‘Danger? I? Nay, Madam, your solicitude does me honour. I have some influence; my intention is to exert it, before it be too late.’

‘Will you allow me to thank you at least?’

‘Nay, Madam,’ he said coldly, ‘there is no need for that. My life is at your service, and I am already more than repaid.’

‘And mine will be at yours, Sir Percy, if you will but accept it, in exchange for what you do for Armand,’ she said, as, impulsively, she stretched out both her hands to him. ‘There! I will not detain you. My thoughts go with you. Farewell.’

How lovely she looked in this morning sunlight, with her ardent hair streaming around her shoulders. He bowed very low over her hand; her heart thrilled with joy and hope.

‘You will come back?’ she said tenderly.

‘Very soon!’ he replied.

‘And you will remember?’ she asked.

‘I will always remember, Madam, that you have honoured me by commanding my services.’

The words were cold and formal, but they did not chill her. Her woman’s heart had read beneath the impassive mask his pride still forced him to wear.

He bowed to her again, then begged her leave to depart. She stood on one side whilst he jumped on to Sultan’s

back, then, as he galloped out of the gates, she waved him a final good-bye.

A bend in the road soon hid him from view ; his confidential groom had some difficulty in keeping pace with him, for Sultan flew along in response to his master's excited mood. Marguerite, with a sigh that was almost a happy one, turned and went within. She went back to her room, for suddenly, like a tired child, she felt quite sleepy. Her heart seemed all at once to be in complete peace, and, though it still ached with undefined longing, a vague and delicious hope soothed it as with a balm. She felt no longer anxious about Armand. The man who had just ridden away, bent on helping her brother, inspired her with complete confidence in his strength and power. She marvelled at herself for having ever looked upon him as a fool ; of course, that was a mask worn to hide the bitter wound she had dealt to his faith and to his love. He still cared, though he had suffered deeply.

But now all would be well : she would crush her own pride, humble it before him, tell him everything, trust him in everything ; and those happy days would come back, when they used to wander off together in the forests near Paris. The more she thought of the events of the past night, the less fear she had of Chauvelin and his schemes. He had failed to discover the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel, of that she felt sure. Both Lord Fancourt and Chauvelin himself had assured her that no one had been in the dining-room at one o'clock except the Frenchman himself and Percy—Yes ! Percy ! she might have asked him, had she thought of it ! Anyway, she had no fears that the unknown and brave hero would fall into Chauvelin's trap ; his death at any rate would not be at her door.

Armand certainly was still in danger, but Percy would see that Armand would be safe, and somehow, as Marguerite had seen him riding away, the possibility that he could fail in whatever he undertook never even remotely crossed her mind. When Armand was safely over in England she would not allow him to go back to France.

She felt almost happy now, and, drawing the curtains closely together again to shut out the piercing sun, she went to bed at last, laid her head upon the pillow, and soon fell into a peaceful and dreamless sleep.

CHAPTER XIII

THE MYSTERIOUS DEVICE

THE day was well advanced when Marguerite woke, refreshed by her long sleep. Louise had brought her some fresh milk and a dish of fruit, and she partook of this frugal breakfast with hearty appetite. Thoughts crowded thick and fast in her mind as she munched her grapes ; most of them went galloping away after the tall, erect figure of her husband, whom she had watched riding out of sight more than five hours ago.

In answer to her eager inquiries, Louise brought back the news that the groom had come home with Sultan, having left Sir Percy in London. The groom thought that his master was about to get on board his schooner, which was lying off just below London Bridge. Sir Percy had ridden thus far, had then met Briggs, the skipper of the *Day Dream*, and had sent the groom back to Richmond with Sultan and the empty saddle.

This news puzzled Marguerite more than ever. Where could Sir Percy be going just now in the *Day Dream* ? On Armand's behalf, he had said. Well ! Sir Percy had influential friends everywhere. But Marguerite ceased to conjecture ; all would soon be explained : he said that he would come back, and that he would remember. So she dressed and prepared to go downstairs.

She crossed the landing outside her own apartments, and stood still for a moment at the head of the fine oak staircase, which led to the lower floor. On her left were her husband's rooms which she practically never entered. They consisted of bedroom, dressing and reception-room,

and, at the extreme end of the landing, of a small study, which, when Sir Percy did not use it, was always kept locked. His own special and confidential valet, Frank, had charge of this room. No one was ever allowed to go inside. A sudden, burning, childish curiosity seized Marguerite to have a peep herself. The door was ajar, and she could not see anything within. She pushed it open ; there was no sound ; Frank was evidently not there, and she walked boldly in.

At once she was struck by the severe simplicity of everything around her : the dark and heavy hangings, the massive oak furniture, the one or two maps on the wall, in no way recalled to her mind the lazy man about town, the lover of race-courses, the leader of fashion, that was the outward representation of Sir Percy Blakeney. There was no sign here, at any rate, of hurried departure. Everything was in its place, not a scrap of paper littered the floor, not a cupboard or drawer was left open. The curtains were drawn aside, and through the open window the fresh morning air was streaming in. Facing the window, and well into the centre of the room, stood a business-like desk, which looked as if it had seen much service. On the wall to the left of the desk, reaching almost from floor to ceiling, was a large full-length portrait of a woman, magnificently framed and exquisitely painted. It was Percy's mother.

Marguerite studied the portrait ; after that she turned and looked again at the desk. It was covered with a mass of papers, all neatly tied and docketed, which looked like accounts and receipts arranged with perfect method. It had never before struck Marguerite—nor had she, alas ! found it worth while to inquire—as to how Sir Percy, whom all the world had credited with a total lack of brains, administered the vast fortune which his father had left him.

Since she had entered this neat, orderly room, she had been taken so much by surprise that this obvious proof of her husband's strong business capacities did not cause her more than a passing thought of wonder. But it also

strengthened her in the now certain knowledge that, with his foolish ways and talk, he was not only wearing a mask, but was playing a deliberate and studied part. Marguerite wondered again. Why should he take all this trouble? Why should he—who was obviously a serious, earnest man—wish to appear before his fellow-men as an empty-headed fool?

Her head began to ache; she turned away from this strange chamber which she had entered, and which she did not understand. She did not wish Frank to find her here, and with a last look round, she once more turned to the door. And as she did so, her foot knocked against a small object, which had apparently been lying close to the desk, on the carpet, and which now went rolling right across the room.

She stooped to pick it up. It was a solid gold ring, with a flat shield, on which was engraved a small device. Marguerite turned it over in her fingers, and then studied the engraving on the shield. It represented a small star-shaped flower, of a shape she had seen so distinctly twice before: once at the opera, and once at Lord Grenville's ball.

CHAPTER XIV

THE SCARLET PIMPERNEL

AT what particular moment the strange doubt first crept into Marguerite's mind, she could not herself afterwards have said. With the ring tightly clutched in her hand, she had run out of the room, down the stairs, and out into the garden, where, in complete seclusion, she could look again at the ring, and study that device more closely. Her thoughts were in a whirl—her mind a blank. She did not see anything that was going on around her, and was quite startled when a fresh young voice called to her across the garden.

‘Darling! where are you?’ and little Suzanne, fresh

as a rosebud, with eyes dancing with glee, and brown curls fluttering in the soft morning breeze, came running across the lawn.

‘They told me you were in the garden,’ she went on prattling merrily and throwing herself with a pretty girlish impulse into Marguerite’s arms, ‘so I ran out to give you a surprise. You did not expect me, did you, my darling Margot?’

Marguerite, who had hastily concealed the ring in the folds of her kerchief, tried to respond gaily and unconcernedly to the young girl’s impulsiveness.

‘Indeed, sweet one,’ she said with a smile, ‘it is delightful to see you. Tell me: what is the latest news about your father?’

‘Oh!’ said Suzanne, with glee, ‘the best we could possibly hear. Lord Hastings came to see mama early this morning. He said that all is now well with dear papa, and we may safely expect him here in England in less than four days.’

‘Yes?’ said Marguerite.

‘Oh, we have no fear now! You don’t know, darling, that that great and noble Scarlet Pimpernel himself has gone to save papa. He has gone, darling, actually gone,’ added Suzanne excitedly. ‘He was in London this morning; he will be in Calais, perhaps, tomorrow, where he will meet papa, and then—and then—’

The blow had fallen. She had expected it all along, though she had tried for the last half-hour to delude herself and to cheat her fears. He had gone to Calais, had been in London this morning—he—the Scarlet Pimpernel—Percy Blakeney—her husband—whom she had betrayed last night to Chauvelin!

Just then a groom came running round the house towards his mistress. He carried a sealed letter in his hand.

‘What is that?’ asked Marguerite.

‘Just come by runner, my lady.’

‘Who sent it?’ she said.

‘The runner said, my lady,’ replied the groom, ‘that

his orders were to deliver this, and that your ladyship would understand from whom it came.'

Marguerite tore open the envelope. Already her instinct had told her what it contained, and her eyes only glanced at it mechanically. It was a letter written by Armand St Just to Sir Andrew Ffoulkes—the letter which Chauvelin's spies had stolen at 'The Fisherman's Rest' and which Chauvelin had held as a rod over her to enforce her obedience. Now he had kept his word—he had sent her back St Just's compromising letter. For he was on the track of the Scarlet Pimpernel.

Marguerite's senses reeled, her very soul seemed to be leaving her body; she tottered, and would have fallen but for Suzanne's arm round her waist. With superhuman effort she regained control over herself—there was yet much to be done.

'Bring that runner here to me,' she said to the servant, with much calm. 'He has not gone?'

'No, my lady.'

The groom went, and Marguerite turned to Suzanne.

'And you, child, run within. I fear I must send you home. And—stay, tell one of the maids to prepare a travelling dress and cloak for me.'

Suzanne made no reply. She kissed Marguerite tenderly, and obeyed without a word; the child was over-awed by the terrible, nameless misery in her friend's face. A minute later the groom returned, followed by the runner who had brought the letter.

'Who gave you this packet?' asked Marguerite.

'A gentleman, my lady,' replied the man, 'at "The Rose and Thistle" inn opposite Charing Cross. He said you would understand.'

'At "The Rose and Thistle"? What was he doing?'

'He was waiting for the coach, your ladyship, which he had ordered.'

'The coach?'

'Yes, my lady. A special coach he had ordered. I understood from his man that he was posting straight to Dover.'

‘That’s enough. You may go.’ Then she turned to the groom: ‘My coach and the four swiftest horses in the stables, to be ready at once.’

The groom and runner both went quickly off to obey. Marguerite remained standing for a moment on the lawn quite alone. Her graceful figure was as rigid as a statue, her eyes were fixed, her hands were tightly clasped across her breast: her lips moved, as they murmured with pathetic heart-breaking persistence—‘What’s to be done? What’s to be done? Where to find him?—Oh, God! grant me light.’

But this was not the moment for remorse and despair. She had done—unwittingly—an awful and terrible thing—the very worst crime in her eyes that woman ever committed—she saw it in all its horror. Her very blindness in not having guessed her husband’s secret seemed now to her another deadly sin. She ought to have known! she ought to have known!

Percy had started for Calais, utterly unconscious of the fact that his most relentless enemy was on his heels. He had set sail early that morning from London Bridge. Provided he had a favourable wind, he would no doubt be in France within twenty-four hours; no doubt he had reckoned on the wind and chosen this route.

Chauvelin, on the other hand, would post to Dover, charter a vessel there, and undoubtedly reach Calais much about the same time. Once in Calais, Percy would meet all those who were eagerly waiting for the noble and brave Scarlet Pimpernel, who had come to rescue them from horrible and unmerited death. With Chauvelin’s eyes now fixed upon his every movement, Percy would thus not only be endangering his own life, but that of Suzanne’s father, the old Count de Tournay, and of those other fugitives who were waiting for him and trusting in him. There was also Armand, who had gone to meet de Tournay, secure in the knowledge that the Scarlet Pimpernel was watching over his safety. All these lives, and that of her husband, lay in Marguerite’s hands; these she must save, if human pluck and ingenuity were equal to the task.

Unfortunately, she could not do all this quite alone. Once in Calais she would not know where to find her husband, whilst Chauvelin, in stealing the papers at Dover, had obtained the whole plan. Above everything, she wished to warn Percy.

She knew enough about him by now to understand that he would never abandon those who trusted in him, that he would not turn back from danger, and leave the Count to fall into the bloodthirsty hands that knew no mercy. But if he were warned, he might form new plans, be more wary, more prudent. Unconsciously, he might fall into a cunning trap, but—once warned—he might yet succeed.

And if he failed—if indeed Fate, and Chauvelin, with all the resources at his command, proved too strong for the daring plotter after all—then at least she should be there by his side, to comfort, love and cherish, to cheat death perhaps at the last by making it seem sweet, if they died both together, with the supreme happiness of knowing that all misunderstandings were at an end.

Her whole body stiffened as with a great and firm resolution. This she meant to do, if God gave her wits and strength. Her eyes glowed with inward fire at the thought of meeting him again so soon, in the very midst of most deadly perils; they sparkled with the joy of sharing these dangers with him—of helping him perhaps—of being with him at the last—if she failed.

CHAPTER XV

THE FRIEND

LESS than half an hour later, Marguerite, buried in thoughts, sat inside her coach, which was bearing her swiftly to London. She had sent a messenger with a respectful letter of excuse to His Royal Highness, begging for a postponement of the party on account of pressing and urgent business.

She had ordered her coach to drive her to the 'Crown' inn ; once there, she told her coachman to give the horses food and rest. Then she ordered a chair, and had herself carried to the house of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes. Sir Andrew was at home, and his servant introduced her ladyship immediately. She went upstairs to the young man's comfortable bachelor's chambers, and was shown into a small, though luxuriously furnished, dining-room. A moment or two later Sir Andrew himself appeared.

He had evidently been much startled when he heard who his lady visitor was, for he looked anxiously—even suspiciously—at Marguerite, whilst performing the elaborate bows before her, which the rigid etiquette of the time demanded.

Marguerite had laid aside every vestige of nervousness ; she was perfectly calm, and having returned the young man's salute, she began very calmly—'Sir Andrew, I have no desire to waste valuable time in much talk. You must take certain things I am going to tell you for granted. These will be of no importance. What is important is, that your leader and comrade, the Scarlet Pimpernel—my husband—Percy Blakeney, is in deadly peril.'

Had she had the remotest doubt of the correctness of her deductions, she would have had them confirmed now, for Sir Andrew, completely taken by surprise, had grown very pale, and was quite incapable of making the slightest attempt at clever parrying.

'No matter how I know this, Sir Andrew,' she continued quietly ; 'thank God that I do, and that perhaps it is not too late to save him. Unfortunately, I cannot do this quite alone, and therefore have come to you for help.'

'Lady Blakeney,' said the young man, trying to recover himself, 'I . . .'

'Will you hear me first ?' she interrupted, 'this is how the matter stands. When the agent of the French Government stole your papers that night in Dover, he found among them certain plans which you or your leader meant to carry out for the rescue of the Count de Tournay and others. The Scarlet Pimpernel—Percy, my husband

—has gone on this errand himself today. Chauvelin knows that the Scarlet Pimpernel and Percy Blakeney are one and the same person. He will follow him to Calais, and there will lay hands on him. You know as well as I do the fate that awaits him at the hands of the Revolutionary Government of France. No interference from England—from King George himself—would save him. They would see to it that the interference came too late. But not only that, the much-trusted leader will also have been unconsciously the means of revealing the hiding-place of the Count and of all those who, even now, are placing their hopes in him.'

She had spoken quietly, but with firm, unbending resolution. Her purpose was to make that young man trust and help her, for she could do nothing without him.

'I do not understand,' he repeated, trying to gain time to think what was best to be done.

'Aye! but I think you do, Sir Andrew. You must know that I am speaking the truth. Look these facts straight in the face. Percy has sailed for Calais, I presume for some lonely part of the coast, and Chauvelin is on his track. *He* has posted for Dover, and will cross the Channel probably tonight. What do you think will happen?'

The young man was silent.

'Percy will arrive at his destination: unconscious of being followed, he will seek out de Tournay and the others—among these is Armand St Just, my brother—he will seek them out, one after another, probably, not knowing that the sharpest eyes in the world are watching his every movement. When he has thus unconsciously betrayed those who blindly trust in him, when nothing can be gained from him, and he is ready to come back to England, with those whom he has gone so bravely to save, the doors of the trap will close upon him, and he will be sent to end his noble life upon the guillotine.'

Still Sir Andrew was silent.

'You do not trust me,' she said passionately. 'Oh, God! cannot you see that I am in deadly earnest? Man,

man,' she added, while with her tiny hands she seized the young man suddenly by the shoulders, forcing him to look straight at her, ' tell me, do I look like that vilest thing on earth—a woman who would betray her own husband ? '

' God forbid, Lady Blakeney,' said the young man at last, ' that I should attribute such evil motives to you, but . . . '

' But what ? Tell me. Quick, man ! The very seconds are precious ! '

' Will you tell me,' he asked her resolutely, and looking searchingly into her blue eyes, ' whose hand helped to guide Chauvelin to the knowledge which you say he possesses ? '

' Mine,' she said quietly, ' I own it—I will not lie to you, for I wish you to trust me absolutely. But I had no idea —how *could* I have ?—of the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel ; and my brother's safety was to be my prize if I succeeded.'

' In helping Chauvelin to track the Scarlet Pimpernel ? '

She nodded. ' It is no use telling you how he forced my hand. Armand is more than a brother to me, and . . . how *could* I guess ? But we waste time, Sir Andrew. Every second is precious. In the name of God ! My husband is in peril—your friend !—your comrade !—Help me to save him.'

Sir Andrew felt his position to be a very awkward one. The oath he had taken before his leader and comrade was one of obedience and secrecy ; and yet the beautiful woman, who was asking him to trust her, was undoubtedly in earnest ; his friend and leader was equally undoubtedly in imminent danger.

' Lady Blakeney,' he said at last, ' God knows you have perplexed me so that I do not know which way my duty lies. Tell me what you wish me to do. There are nineteen of us ready to lay down our lives for the Scarlet Pimpernel if he is in danger.'

' There is no need for lives just now, my friend,' she said drily, ' my wits and four swift horses will serve the necessary purpose. But I must know where to find him.

See,' she added, while her eyes filled with tears, ' I have humbled myself before you ; I have owned my fault to you ; shall I also confess my weakness ?—My husband and I have been estranged, because he did not trust me, and because I was too blind to understand. You must confess that the bandage which he put over my eyes was a very thick one. Is it small wonder that I did not see through it ? But last night, after I led him unwittingly into such deadly peril, it suddenly fell from my eyes. If you will not help me, Sir Andrew, I shall still strive to save my husband. I shall still exert every faculty I possess for his sake ; but I might be powerless, for I might arrive too late, and nothing would be left for you but lifelong remorse, and—for me, a broken heart.'

' But, Lady Blakeney,' said the young man, touched by her gentle earnestness, ' do you know that what you propose to do is man's work ?—you cannot possibly journey to Calais alone. You would be running the greatest possible risks to yourself, and your chances of finding your husband now—were I to direct you ever so carefully—are infinitely remote.'

' Oh, I hope there are risks ! ' she murmured softly. ' I hope there are dangers, too !—I have so much to atone for. But I fear you are mistaken. Chauvelin's eyes are fixed upon you all ; he will scarcely notice me. Quick, Sir Andrew !—the coach is ready, and there is not a moment to be lost. . . . I *must* get to him ! '

' Faith, Madam, you must command me. Gladly would I or any of my comrades lay down our lives for your husband. If you *will* go yourself . . . '

' Nay, friend, do you not see that I should go mad if I let you go without me ? ' She stretched out her hand to him. ' You *will* trust me ? '

' I await your orders,' he said simply.

' Listen, then. My coach is ready to take me to Dover. Do you follow me as swiftly as horses will take you. We meet at nightfall at "The Fisherman's Rest". Chauvelin would avoid it, as he is known there, and I think it would be the safest. I will gladly accept your escort to Calais.

As you say, I might miss Sir Percy were you to direct me ever so carefully. We'll charter a schooner at Dover, and cross over during the night. Disguised, if you will agree to it, as my servant, you will, I think, escape detection.'

'I am entirely at your service, Madam,' rejoined the young man earnestly. 'I trust to God that you will sight the *Day Dream* before we reach Calais. With Chauvelin at his heels, every step the Scarlet Pimpernel takes on French soil is fraught with danger.'

'God grant it, Sir Andrew. But now, farewell. We meet tonight at Dover! It will be a race between Chauvelin and me across the Channel tonight—and the prize—the life of the Scarlet Pimpernel.'

CHAPTER XVI

SUSPENSE

IT was late at night when she at last reached 'The Fisherman's Rest'. She had done the whole journey in less than eight hours, thanks to innumerable changes of horses at the various coaching stations, for which she always paid lavishly, thus obtaining the very best and swiftest that could be had.

The coffee-room—the scene lately of the dastardly outrage on two English gentlemen—was quite deserted. Mr Jellyband hastily relit the lamp, rekindled a cheerful bit of fire in the great hearth, and then wheeled a comfortable chair by it, into which Marguerite gratefully sank.

'I shall be crossing over at the first turn of the tide,' she told him, 'and in the first schooner I can get. But my coachman and men will stay the night, and probably several days longer, so I hope you will make them comfortable.'

'Yes, my lady; I'll look after them. Shall Sally bring your ladyship some supper?'

‘Yes, please. Put something cold on the table, and as soon as Sir Andrew Ffoulkes comes, show him in here.’

‘Yes, my lady.’

Honest Jellyband’s face now expressed distress in spite of himself. He had great regard for Sir Percy Blakeney, and did not like to see his lady running away with young Sir Andrew. Of course, it was no business of his, and Mr Jellyband was no gossip.

‘Don’t sit up, honest Jellyband,’ continued Marguerite kindly. ‘Sir Andrew may be late.’

Then commenced a period of weary waiting for Marguerite. The beautiful warm October’s day, so happily begun, had turned into a rough and cold night. She felt very chilly, and was glad of the cheerful blaze in the hearth ; but gradually, as time wore on, the weather became more rough, and the sound of the great breakers against the Admiralty Pier, though some distance from the inn, came to her like the noise of muffled thunder.

A sudden commotion outside roused her from her meditations. Evidently it was Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, just arrived in mad haste, for she heard his horse’s hoofs thundering on the flag-stones outside, then Mr Jellyband’s sleepy yet cheerful tones bidding him welcome.

The innkeeper followed Sir Andrew into the coffee-room, looking strangely perplexed. The young gallant’s disguise had confirmed his worst suspicions. Without a smile upon his jovial face, he drew the cork from a bottle of wine, set the chairs ready, and prepared to wait.

‘Thanks, honest friend,’ said Marguerite, who was smiling at the thought of what the worthy fellow must be thinking, ‘we shall require nothing more.’

‘Stay, Lady Blakeney,’ interposed Sir Andrew, as Jellyband was about to retire, ‘I am afraid we shall require something more of my friend Jelly’s hospitality. I am sorry to say we cannot cross over tonight.’

‘Not cross over tonight ?’ she repeated in amazement. ‘But we must, Sir Andrew, we must ! There can be no question of “cannot” ; whatever it may cost, we must get a vessel tonight.’

But the young man shook his head sadly.

‘I am afraid it is not a question of cost, Lady Blakeney. There is a nasty storm blowing from France, the wind is dead against us, we cannot possibly sail until it has changed.’

Marguerite became deadly pale. She had not foreseen this. Nature herself was playing her a horrible, cruel trick. Percy was in danger, and she could not go to him, because the wind happened to blow from the coast of France.

‘But we must go!—we must!’ she repeated with strange, persistent energy, ‘you know we must go!—can’t you find a way?’

‘I have been down to the shore already,’ he said, ‘and had a talk to one or two skippers. It is quite impossible to set sail tonight, so every sailor assured me. No one,’ he added, looking significantly at Marguerite, ‘*no one* could possibly put out of Dover tonight.’

Marguerite at once understood what he meant. *No one* included Chauvelin as well as herself. She nodded pleasantly to Jellyband.

‘Well, then, I must resign myself,’ she said to him. ‘Have you a room for me?’

‘Oh, yes, your ladyship. A nice, bright, airy room. I’ll see to it at once. And there is another one for Sir Andrew—both quite ready.’

‘Excellent, honest Jelly,’ said Sir Andrew, gaily, and clapping his worthy host vigorously on the back. ‘You unlock both those rooms, and leave our candles here on the dresser. I vow you are dead with sleep, and her ladyship must have some supper before she retires. There, have no fear, her ladyship’s visit, though at this unusual hour, is a great honour to your house, and Sir Percy Blakeney will reward you doubly, if you see well to her privacy and comfort.’

Sir Andrew had no doubt guessed the many conflicting doubts and fears which raged in honest Jellyband’s head: and, as he was a gallant gentleman, he tried by this hint to allay some of the worthy innkeeper’s suspicions. He

had the satisfaction of seeing that he had partially succeeded. Jellyband's red face brightened somewhat at mention of Sir Percy's name.

'I'll go and see to it at once, sir,' he said with alacrity.
'Has her ladyship everything she wants for supper?'

'Everything, thanks, honest friend, and as I am famished and dead with fatigue, I pray you see to the rooms.'

'Now tell me,' she said eagerly, as soon as Jellyband had gone from the room, 'tell me all your news.'

'There is nothing else much to tell you, Lady Blakeney,' replied the young man. 'The storm makes it quite impossible for any vessel to put out of Dover this tide. But what seemed to you at first a terrible calamity, is really a blessing in disguise. If we cannot cross over to France tonight, Chauvelin is in the same difficulty.'

'He may have left before the storm broke out.'

'God grant he may,' said Sir Andrew, merrily, 'for very likely then he'll have been driven out of his course! Who knows? He may now even be lying at the bottom of the sea, for there is a furious storm raging, and it will fare ill with a small craft which happens to be out. But I fear we cannot build our hopes upon the shipwreck of that cunning devil, and of all his murderous plans. The sailors I spoke to, all assured me that no schooner had put out of Dover for several hours: on the other hand, I ascertained that a stranger had arrived by coach this afternoon, and had, like myself, made some inquiries about crossing over to France.'

'Then Chauvelin is still in Dover?'

'Undoubtedly. Shall I go waylay him and run my sword through him? That were indeed the quickest way out of the difficulty.'

'Nay! Sir Andrew, do not jest! Alas! I have often since last night caught myself wishing for that fiend's death. But what you suggest is impossible. The laws of this country do not permit of murder. It is only in our beautiful France that wholesale slaughter is done lawfully, in the name of liberty and of brotherly love.'

CHAPTER XVII

CALAIS

MARGUERITE spent over fifteen hours in such acute mental torture as well-nigh drove her crazy. After a sleepless night, she rose before any one else in the house was astir, so frightened was she lest she should miss the one golden opportunity of making a start.

When she came downstairs, she found Sir Andrew Ffoulkes sitting in the coffee-room. He had been out half an hour earlier, and had gone to the Admiralty Pier, only to find that neither the French packet nor any private vessel could put out of Dover yet. The storm was then at its fullest, and the tide was on the turn. If the wind did not abate or change, they would perforce have to wait another ten or twelve hours until the next tide, before a start could be made. And the storm had not abated, the wind had not changed, and the tide was rapidly drawing out.

Marguerite felt the sickness of despair when she heard this melancholy news. Only the most firm resolution kept her from totally breaking down, and thus adding to the young man's anxiety, which evidently had become very keen. How they spent that wearisome day at Dover, Marguerite could never afterwards say. She was in terror of showing herself, lest Chauvelin's spies happened to be about, so she ordered a private sitting-room, and she and Sir Andrew sat there hour after hour, trying to take, at long intervals, some perfunctory meals, with nothing to do but to think, to conjecture, and only occasionally to hope.

The storm had abated just too late ; the tide was by then too far out to allow a vessel to put off to sea. The wind had changed, and was settling down to a comfortable north-westerly breeze—a veritable godsend for a speedy passage across to France.

And there those two waited, wondering if the hour would ever come when they could finally make a start. There had been one happy interval in this long weary day, and that was when Sir Andrew went down once again to the pier, and presently came back to tell Marguerite that he had chartered a quick schooner, whose skipper was ready to put to sea the moment the tide was favourable. From that moment the hours seemed less wearisome ; there was less hopelessness in the waiting, and at last, at five o'clock in the afternoon, Marguerite, closely veiled and followed by Sir Andrew Ffoulkes in the guise of her servant, found her way down to the pier.

Once on board, the keen, fresh sea-air revived her ; the breeze was just strong enough to swell the sails of the *Foam Crest*, as she cut her way merrily towards the open. The sunset was glorious after the storm, and Marguerite, as she watched the white cliffs of Dover gradually disappearing from view, felt more at peace, and once more almost hopeful. Sir Andrew was full of kind attentions, and she felt how lucky she had been to have him by her side in this, her great trouble.

Gradually the grey coast of France began to emerge from the fast-gathering evening mists. One or two lights could be seen flickering, and the spires of several churches rising out of the surrounding haze.

Half an hour later Marguerite had landed upon the French shore. The very aspect of the country and its people, even in this remote sea-coast town, spoke of that seething revolution, three hundred miles away, in beautiful Paris, now rendered hideous by the constant flow of the blood of her noblest sons, by the wailing of the widows, and the cries of the fatherless children.

The men all wore red caps—in various stages of cleanliness—but all with the tricolour cockade pinned on the left-hand side. Every man nowadays was a spy upon his fellows : the most innocent word uttered in jest might at any time be brought up as a proof of aristocratic tendencies, or of treachery against the people. Even the women went about with a curious look of fear and of hate lurking

in their brown eyes, and all watched Marguerite as she stepped on shore, followed by Sir Andrew, and murmured as she passed along: 'Cursed aristocrats!' or else 'Cursed English!' Marguerite wondered how her husband's tall, massive figure could have passed through Calais unobserved: what disguise he had assumed.

Without exchanging more than a few words, Sir Andrew led her right across the town, to the other side from that where they had landed, and on the way towards Cape Gris-Nez. The streets were narrow, tortuous, and mostly evil-smelling. There had been a heavy rain during the storm last night, and sometimes she sank ankle deep in the mud, for the roads were not lighted save by the occasional glimmer from a lamp inside a house. But she did not heed any of these petty discomforts: 'We may meet Blakeney at the "Grey Cat,"' Sir Andrew had said, when they landed, and she was walking as if on a carpet of rose-leaves, for she was going to meet him almost at once.

At last they reached their destination. Sir Andrew evidently knew the road, for he had walked unerringly in the dark, and had not asked his way from any one. It was too dark then for Marguerite to notice the outside aspect of the house. The 'Grey Cat', as Sir Andrew had called it, was evidently a small wayside inn on the outskirts of Calais, and on the way to Gris-Nez. It lay some little distance from the coast, for the sound of the sea seemed to come from afar.

Sir Andrew knocked at the door with the knob of his cane, and from within Marguerite heard a sort of grunt and the muttering of a number of oaths. Sir Andrew knocked again, this time more sharply: more oaths were heard, and then shuffling steps seemed to draw near the door. Presently this was thrown open, and Marguerite found herself on the threshold of the most dilapidated, most squalid room she had ever seen.

The paper, such as it was, was hanging from the walls in strips; there did not seem to be a single piece of furniture in the room that could, by the wildest stretch

of imagination, be called whole. Most of the chairs had broken backs, others had no seats to them, one corner of the table was propped up with a bundle of faggots where the fourth leg had been broken. In one corner of the room there was a huge hearth, over which hung a stock-pot, with a not altogether unpalatable odour of hot soup coming from it. On one side of the room, high up in the wall, there was a kind of loft, before which hung a tattered blue-and-white checked curtain. A rickety set of steps led up to this loft.

The whole of this sordid abode was dimly lighted by an evil-smelling oil-lamp, which hung from the rafters. It all looked so horribly dirty and uninviting, that Marguerite hardly dared to cross the threshold. Sir Andrew, however, had stepped unhesitatingly forward.

‘English travellers, citizen !’ he said boldly, and speaking in French.

The individual who had come to the door in response to Sir Andrew’s knock, and who, presumably, was the owner of this squalid abode, was an elderly, heavily-built peasant, dressed in a dirty blue blouse, heavy clogs, from which wisps of straw protruded all round, shabby blue trousers, and the inevitable red cap with the tricolour cockade, that proclaimed his momentary political views. He carried a short wooden pipe, from which issued the odour of rank tobacco. He looked with some suspicion and a great deal of contempt at the two travellers, muttered ‘Cursed English !’ and spat upon the ground further to show his independence of spirit. Nevertheless, he stood aside to let them enter, no doubt well aware that these same ‘cursed English’ had well-filled purses.

‘Oh !’ said Marguerite, as she advanced into the room, holding her handkerchief to her nose, ‘what a dreadful hole ! Are you sure this is the place ?’

‘Aye ! it is the place, sure enough,’ replied the young man as, with his own lace-edged, fashionable handkerchief, he dusted a chair for Marguerite to sit on; ‘but certainly I never saw a more villainous hole.’

By the hearth sat a huddled-up figure clad mostly in

rags : it was apparently a woman, although even that would have been hard to distinguish, except for the cap, which had once been white, and for what looked like a skirt. She was sitting mumbling to herself, and from time to time stirring the stock-pot.

‘ Hey, my friend ! ’ said Sir Andrew at last, ‘ we should like some supper. The citizeness there,’ he added, pointing to the huddled-up bundle of rags by the hearth, ‘ is concocting some delicious soup, I’ll warrant, and my mistress has not tasted food for several hours.’

It took Brogard—that appeared to be his name—some few minutes to consider the question. A free citizen does not respond too readily to the wishes of those who happen to require something of him !

‘ Cursed English ! ’ he murmured, and once more spat upon the ground. Then he went very slowly up to a dresser which stood in a corner of the room ; from this he took an old pewter soup-tureen and slowly, and without a word, handed it to his wife, who, in the same silence, began filling the tureen with the soup out of her stock-pot.

Marguerite had watched all these preparations with absolute horror ; were it not for the earnestness of her purpose, she would have fled from this abode of dirt and evil smells.

‘ Faith ! our host and hostess are not cheerful people,’ said Sir Andrew, seeing the look of horror on Marguerite’s face. ‘ I would I could offer you a more hearty and more appetizing meal. But I think you will find the soup eatable and the wine good ; these people wallow in dirt but live well as a rule.’

‘ Nay ; I pray you, Sir Andrew,’ she said gently, ‘ be not anxious about me. My mind is scarcely inclined to dwell on thoughts of supper.’

Brogard was slowly pursuing his gruesome preparations ; he had placed a couple of spoons, also two glasses on the table, both of which Sir Andrew took the precaution of wiping carefully. Brogard had also produced a bottle of wine and some bread, and Marguerite made an effort to

draw her chair to the table and to make some pretence at eating. Sir Andrew, as befitting a servant, stood behind her chair.

‘ Madam, I pray you,’ he said, seeing that Marguerite seemed quite unable to eat, ‘ Try and swallow some food—remember you have need of all your strength.’

The soup certainly was not bad ; it smelt and tasted good. Marguerite might have enjoyed it, but for the horrible surroundings. She broke the bread, however, and drank some of the wine.

‘ Sir Andrew,’ she said, ‘ I do not like to see you standing. You have need of food just as much as I. This creature will only think that I am an eccentric English-woman eloping with her servant, if you sit down and share this semblance of supper beside me.’

Indeed, Brogard having placed what was strictly necessary upon the table, seemed not to trouble himself any further about his guests. His wife had quietly shuffled out of the room, and the man stood and lounged about, smoking his evil-smelling pipe, sometimes under Marguerite’s very nose, as any free-born citizen who was anybody’s equal should do.

‘ Hey ! my friend,’ said Sir Andrew pleasantly, tapping him lightly on the shoulder, ‘ do you see many English travellers in these parts ? ’

Brogard looked round at him, over his near shoulder, puffed away at his pipe for a moment or two as if he were in no hurry, then muttered—

‘ Sometimes ! ’

‘ Ah ! ’ said Sir Andrew, carelessly. ‘ English travellers always know where they can get good wine, eh ! my friend ?—Now, tell me, my lady wanted to know if by any chance you have seen a great friend of hers, an English gentleman, who often comes to Calais on business ; he is tall, and recently was on his way to Paris—my lady hoped to have met him in Calais.’

Marguerite tried not to look at Brogard, lest she should betray before him the burning anxiety with which she waited for his reply. But a free-born French citizen

is never in any hurry to answer questions : Brogard took his time, then he said very slowly—

‘ Tall Englishman ?—today !—yes.’

‘ You have seen him ? ’ asked Sir Andrew, carelessly.

‘ Yes, today,’ muttered Brogard, sullenly. Then he quietly took Sir Andrew’s hat from a chair close by, put it on his own head, tugged at his dirty blouse, and generally tried to express in pantomime that the individual in question wore very fine clothes. ‘ Cursed aristocrat ! ’ he muttered, ‘ that tall Englishman ! ’

‘ Ah, yes, my friend,’ said Sir Andrew, ‘ my lord always wears beautiful clothes ; the tall Englishman you saw was certainly my lady’s friend. And he has gone, you say ? ’

‘ He went . . . yes . . . but he’s coming back . . . here—he ordered supper.’

‘ But where is he now ? Do you know ? ’ Marguerite asked eagerly, placing her dainty white hand upon the dirty sleeve of his blue blouse.

‘ He went to get a horse and cart,’ said Brogard, shortly, as, with a surly gesture, he shook off her hand.

‘ At what time did he go ? ’ But Brogard had evidently had enough of these questionings. ‘ I don’t know,’ he said, surlily. ‘ I have said enough. He came today. He ordered supper. He went out. He’ll come back. And that’s all.’

And with this parting assertion of his rights as a citizen and free man to be as rude as he pleased, Brogard shuffled out of the room, banging the door after him.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOPE

‘ ARE we alone ? ’ said Marguerite, gaily, as the young man sat down beside her. ‘ May we talk ? ’

‘ As cautiously as possible ! ’ he entreated.

‘ Faith, man ! but you wear a glum face ! As for me,

I could dance with joy ! Surely there is no longer any cause for fear. Our boat is on the beach, the *Foam Crest* not two miles out to sea, and my husband will be here, under this very roof, within the next half-hour perhaps. Sure ! there is naught to hinder us. Chauvelin and his gang have not yet arrived.'

' Nay, Madam ! that I fear we do not know.'

' What do you mean ? '

' He was at Dover at the same time that we were.'

' Held up by the same storm which kept us from starting.'

' Exactly. But—I did not speak of it before, for I feared to alarm you—I saw him on the beach not five minutes before we embarked. At least, I swore to myself at the time that it was himself ; he was disguised as a priest, so that Satan, his own guardian, would scarcely have known him. But I heard him bargaining for a vessel to take him swiftly to Calais ; and he must have set sail less than an hour after we did.'

Marguerite's face had quickly lost its look of joy. The terrible danger in which Percy stood, now that he was actually on French soil, became suddenly and horribly clear to her. Chauvelin was close upon his heels ; here in Calais, the astute diplomatist was all powerful ; a word from him and Percy could be tracked and arrested. Moreover, when he waylaid Lord Tony and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes in the coffee-room of ' The Fisherman's Rest ' he had obtained possession of all the plans of this latest expedition. Armand St Just, the Count de Tournay and other fugitive royalists were to have met the Scarlet Pimpernel—or rather, as it had been originally arranged, two of his league—on this day, the 2nd of October, at a place evidently known to the league, and vaguely alluded to as ' old Blanchard's hut '.

Armand, whose connexion with the Scarlet Pimpernel and disavowal of the brutal policy of the Republic was still unknown to his countrymen, had left England a little more than a week ago, carrying with him the necessary instructions, which would enable him to meet

the other fugitives and to convey them to this place of safety.

This much Marguerite had fully understood from the first, and Sir Andrew Ffoulkes had confirmed her surmises. She knew, too, that when Sir Percy realized that his own plans and his directions to his lieutenants had been stolen by Chauvelin, it was too late to communicate with Armand or to send fresh instructions to the fugitives. They would, of necessity, be at the appointed time and place, not knowing how grave was the danger which now awaited their brave rescuer. Blakeney, who as usual had planned and organized the whole expedition, would not allow any of his younger comrades to run the risk of almost certain capture. Hence his hurried note to them at Lord Grenville's ball—'Start myself tomorrow—alone'.

And now with his identity known to his most bitter enemy his every step would be dogged the moment he set foot in France. He would be tracked by Chauvelin's men, followed until he reached that mysterious hut where the fugitives were waiting for him, and there the trap would be closed on him and on them.

There was but one hour—the hour's start which Marguerite and Sir Andrew had of their enemy—in which to warn Percy of the imminence of his danger, and to persuade him to give up the foolhardy expedition, which could only end in his own death. But there *was* that one hour.

'Chauvelin knows of this inn, from the papers he stole,' said Sir Andrew earnestly, 'and on landing will make straight for it.'

'He has not landed yet,' she said; 'we have an hour's start of him, and Percy will be here directly. We shall be mid-Channel before Chauvelin realizes that we have slipped through his fingers.'

She spoke excitedly and eagerly, wishing to infuse into her young friend some of that buoyant hope which still clung to her heart. But he shook his head sadly.

'Silent again, Sir Andrew?' she said with some

impatience. ‘ Why do you shake your head and look so glum ? ’

‘ Faith, Madam,’ he replied, ‘ it is only because in making your rose-coloured plans, you are forgetting the most important factor.’

‘ What in the world do you mean ? —I am forgetting nothing. What factor do you mean ? ’ she added with more impatience.

‘ It stands six foot odd high,’ replied Sir Andrew quietly, ‘ and its name is Percy Blakeney.’

‘ I don’t understand,’ she murmured.

‘ Do you think that Blakeney would leave Calais without having accomplished what he set out to do ? ’

‘ You mean ? ’

‘ There’s the old Count de Tournay . . .’

‘ The Count . . . ? ’ she murmured.

‘ And St Just . . . and others . . .’

‘ My brother ! ’ she said, with a heart-broken sob of anguish. ‘ Heaven help me, but I fear I had forgotten.’

‘ Fugitives as they are, these men at this moment await with perfect confidence and unshaken faith the arrival of the Scarlet Pimpernel, who has pledged his honour to take them safely across the Channel. Sir Percy Blakeney would not be the trusted, honoured leader of a score of English gentlemen if he abandoned those who placed their trust in him. As for breaking his word, the very thought is absurd ! ’

There was silence for a moment or two. Marguerite had buried her face in her hands, and was letting the tears slowly trickle through her trembling fingers. The young man said nothing ; his heart ached for this beautiful woman in her awful grief. All along he had felt the terrible fix in which her own rash act had placed them all. He knew his friend and leader so well, with his reckless daring, his mad bravery, his worship of his own word of honour. Sir Andrew knew that Blakeney would brave any danger and run the wildest risks, sooner than break it, and, with Chauvelin at his very heels, would make a final

attempt, however desperate, to rescue those who trusted in him.

‘Faith, Sir Andrew,’ said Marguerite at last, making brave efforts to dry her tears, ‘you are right, and I would not now shame myself by trying to dissuade him from doing his duty. As you say, I should plead in vain. God grant him strength and ability,’ she added fervently and resolutely, ‘to outwit his pursuers. He will not refuse to take you with him, perhaps, when he starts his noble work; between you, you will have cunning as well as valour! God guard you both! In the meanwhile I think we should lose no time. I still believe that his safety depends upon his knowing that Chauvelin is on his track.’

‘Undoubtedly. He has wonderful resources at his command. As soon as he is aware of his danger he will exercise more caution; his ingenuity is a veritable miracle.’

‘Then what say you to some scouting in the village whilst I wait here for him? You might come across Percy’s track and thus save valuable time.’

‘But this is such a villainous place for you to wait in.’

‘I do not mind! But you might ask our surly host if he could let me wait in another room, where I could be safer from the prying eyes of any chance traveller. Offer him some ready money, so that he should not fail to give me word the moment the tall Englishman returns.’

She spoke quite calmly, even cheerfully now, thinking out her plans, ready for the worst if need be. She would show no more weakness, she would prove herself worthy of him, who was about to give his life for the sake of his fellow-men.

Sir Andrew obeyed her without further comment. He went to the door of the inner room, through which Brogard and his wife had disappeared, and knocked; as usual, he was answered by muttered oaths.

‘Hey! friend Brogard!’ said the young man sharply, ‘my lady wants to rest here awhile. Could you give her the use of another room? She wants to be alone.’

He took some money out of his pocket, and allowed it to jingle significantly in his hand. Brogard had opened the door, and listened, with his usual surly apathy, to the young man's request. At sight of the gold, however, his lazy attitude relaxed slightly ; he took his pipe from his mouth and shuffled into the room. He then pointed over his shoulder at the attic up in the wall.

'She can wait up there !' he said with a grunt. 'It's comfortable, and I have no other room.'

'Nothing could be better,' said Marguerite in English ; she at once realized the advantages such a position hidden from view would give her. 'Give him the money, Sir Andrew ; I shall be quite happy up there, and can see everything without being seen.' She nodded to Brogard, who condescended to go up to the attic, and to shake up the straw that lay on the floor.

'May I entreat you, Madam, to do nothing rash,' said Sir Andrew, as Marguerite prepared in her turn to ascend the rickety flight of steps. 'Remember this place is infested with spies. Do not, I beg of you, reveal yourself to Sir Percy, unless you are absolutely certain that you are alone with him.'

Even as he spoke, he felt how unnecessary was this caution : Marguerite was as calm, as clear-headed, as any man. There was no fear of her doing anything that was rash.

'Nay,' she said, with a slight attempt at cheerfulness, 'that can I faithfully promise you. I would not risk my husband's life, nor yet his plans, by speaking to him before strangers. Have no fear, I will watch my opportunity, and serve him in the manner I think he needs most.'

Brogard had come down the steps again, and Marguerite was ready to go up to her safe retreat.

'Be of good cheer,' said Sir Andrew, as she began to mount the steps. 'If I do not come across Blakeney in half an hour, I shall return, expecting to find him here.'

'Yes, that will be best. We can afford to wait for half an hour. Chauvelin cannot possibly be here before that. God grant that either you or I may have seen

Percy by then. Good luck to you, friend! Have no fear for me.'

Lightly she mounted the wooden steps that led to the attic. Brogard was taking no further heed of her. She could make herself comfortable there or not, as she chose. Sir Andrew watched her until she had reached the loft and sat down on the straw. She pulled the tattered curtains across, and the young man noted that she was singularly well placed there for seeing and hearing, whilst remaining unobserved. He had paid Brogard well; the surly old innkeeper would have no object in betraying her. Then Sir Andrew prepared to go. At the door he turned once again and looked up at the loft. Through the ragged curtains Marguerite's sweet face was peeping down at him, and the young man rejoiced to see that it looked serene, and even gently smiling. With a final nod of farewell to her, he walked out into the night.

CHAPTER XIX

THE DEATH-TRAP

THE next quarter of an hour went by swiftly and noiselessly. In the room downstairs, Brogard had for a while busied himself with clearing the table, and rearranging it for another guest.

It was because she watched these preparations, that Marguerite found the time slipping by more pleasantly. It was for Percy that this supper was being got ready. Evidently Brogard had a certain amount of respect for the tall Englishman; he seemed to take some trouble in making the place look a trifle less uninviting than it had done before.

He even produced, from some hidden recess in the old dresser, what actually looked like a tablecloth; and when he spread it out, and saw it was full of holes, he shook his head dubiously for a while, then was at much pains so to

spread it over the table as to hide most of its blemishes. Then he got out an old and ragged cloth, and carefully wiped the glasses, spoons and plates which he put on the table.

Marguerite could not help smiling to herself as she watched all these preparations, which Brogard accomplished to an accompaniment of muttered oaths. When the table was set—such as it was—Brogard surveyed it with evident satisfaction. He then dusted one of the chairs with the corner of his blouse, gave a stir to the stock-pot, threw a fresh bundle of faggots on to the fire, and slouched out of the room. Marguerite was left alone with her reflections. Suddenly her over-sensitive ears caught the sound of distant footsteps drawing near ; her heart gave a wild leap of joy ! Was it Percy at last ? No ; the step did not seem quite as long, nor quite as firm as his : she also thought that she could hear two distinct sets of footsteps. Yes ! that was it ! two men were coming this way. Two strangers, perhaps, to get a drink ?

But she had not time to conjecture, for presently there was a loud knocking on the door, and the next moment it was violently thrown open from the outside, while a rough, commanding voice shouted—‘ Hey ! Citizen Brogard ! Hello ! ’

Marguerite could not see the newcomers, but, through a hole in one of the curtains, she could observe one portion of the room below. She heard Brogard’s shuffling footsteps, as he came out of the inner room, muttering his usual string of oaths. On seeing the strangers, however, he paused in the middle of the room, well within range of Marguerite’s vision, looked at them with even more withering contempt than he had bestowed upon his former guests, and muttered, ‘ Cursed priest ! ’

Marguerite’s heart seemed all at once to stop beating ; her eyes, large and dilated, had fastened on one of the newcomers, who, at this point, had taken a quick step forward towards Brogard. He was dressed in the cassock, broad-brimmed hat and buckled shoes, habitual to the French parish priest, but as he stood opposite the inn-

keeper, he threw open his cassock for a moment, displaying his official tricolour scarf, the sight of which immediately had the effect of transforming Brogard's attitude of contempt into one of servility.

It was the French priest who seemed to freeze the very blood in Marguerite's veins. She could not see his face, which was shaded by his broad-brimmed hat, but she recognized the thin, bony hands, the slight stoop, the whole gait of the man ! It was Chauvelin !

The horror of the situation struck her as with a physical blow ; the awful disappointment, the dread of what was to come, made her very senses reel, and she needed an almost superhuman effort not to fall senseless beneath it all.

‘ A plate of soup and a bottle of wine,’ said Chauvelin imperiously to Brogard, ‘ then clear out of here—understand ? I want to be alone.’

Silently, and without any muttering this time, Brogard obeyed. Chauvelin sat down at the table which had been prepared for the tall Englishman, and the innkeeper busied himself in dishing up the soup and pouring out the wine. The man who had entered with Chauvelin and whom Marguerite could not see, stood waiting close by the door.

At a sign from Chauvelin, Brogard had hurried back to the inner room, and Chauvelin now beckoned to the man who had accompanied him. In him Marguerite at once recognized Desgas, Chauvelin’s secretary and confidential factotum, whom she had often seen in Paris, in the days gone by. He crossed the room, and for a moment or two listened attentively at the Brogards’ door.

‘ Not listening ? ’ asked Chauvelin curtly.

‘ No, citizen.’

For a second Marguerite dreaded lest Chauvelin should order Desgas to search the place ; what would happen if she were discovered, she hardly dared to imagine. Fortunately, however, Chauvelin seemed more impatient to talk to his secretary than afraid of spies, for he called Desgas quickly back to his side.

‘ The English schooner ? ’ he asked.

‘ She was lost sight of at sundown, citizen,’ replied Desgas, ‘ but was then heading towards Cape Gris Nez.’

‘ Ah—good ! ’ muttered Chauvelin ; ‘ and now, about Captain Jutley,—what did he say ? ’

‘ He assured me that all the orders you sent him last week have been implicitly obeyed. All the roads which converge to this place have been patrolled night and day ever since : and the beach and cliffs have been most rigorously searched and guarded.’

‘ Does he know where “ old Blanchard’s hut ” is ? ’

‘ No, citizen, nobody seems to know of it by that name. There are any number of fishermen’s huts all along the coast, of course, but . . .’

‘ That’ll do. Now about tonight ? ’ interrupted Chauvelin impatiently.

‘ The roads and the beach are patrolled as usual, citizen, and Captain Jutley awaits further orders.’

‘ Go back to him at once then. Tell him to send reinforcements to the various patrols ; and especially to those along the beach—you understand ? ’

Chauvelin spoke curtly and to the point, and every word he uttered struck at Marguerite’s heart like the death-knell of her hopes.

‘ The men,’ he continued, ‘ are to keep the sharpest possible look-out for any stranger who may be walking, riding, or driving along the road or the beach, more especially for a tall stranger, whom I need not describe further, as probably he will be disguised ; but he cannot very well conceal his height, except by stooping. You understand ? ’

‘ Perfectly, citizen,’ replied Desgas.

‘ As soon as any of the men have sighted a stranger, two of them are to keep him in view. The man who loses sight of the tall stranger, after he is once seen, will pay for his negligence with his life ; but one man is to ride straight back here and report to me. Is that clear ? ’

‘ Absolutely clear, citizen.’

‘ Very well, then. Go and see Jutley at once. See the

reinforcements start off for the patrol duty, then ask the captain to let you have half a dozen more men and bring them here with you. You can be back in ten minutes. Go !'

Desgas saluted and went to the door.

As Marguerite, sick with horror, listened to Chauvelin's directions to his underling, the whole of the plan for the capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel became appallingly clear to her. Chauvelin wished that the fugitives should be left in false security, waiting in their hidden retreat until Percy joined them. Then the daring plotter was to be surrounded and caught red-handed, in the very act of aiding and abetting royalists, who were traitors to the republic. Thus, if his capture were noised abroad, even the British Government could not legally protest in his favour ; having plotted with the enemies of the French Government, France had the right to put him to death.

Escape for him and them would be impossible. All the roads patrolled and watched, the trap well set, the net, wide at present, but drawing together tighter and tighter, until it closed upon the daring plotter, whose superhuman cunning even could not rescue him from its meshes now.

Desgas was about to go, but Chauvelin once more called him back. 'I had forgotten,' said Chauvelin, with a weird chuckle, as he rubbed his bony, talon-like hands one against the other with a gesture of fiendish satisfaction. 'The tall stranger may show fight. In any case no shooting, remember, except as a last resort. I want that tall stranger alive—if possible.'

Marguerite had thought that by now she had lived through the whole gamut of horror and anguish that human heart could bear ; yet now, when Desgas left the house, and she remained alone in this lonely, squalid room, with that fiend for company, she felt as if all that she had suffered was nothing compared with this. He continued to laugh and chuckle to himself for a while, rubbing his hands together in anticipation of his triumph.

He was now sitting close to the table ; he had taken off his hat, and Marguerite could just see the outline of his

thin profile and pointed chin, as he bent over his meagre supper. He was evidently quite contented, and awaited events with perfect calm ; he even seemed to enjoy Brogard's unsavoury fare. Suddenly, as she watched him, a sound caught her ear, which turned her very heart to stone. And yet that sound was not calculated to inspire any one with horror, for it was merely the cheerful sound of a gay, fresh voice singing lustily, 'God save the King !'

CHAPTER XX

THE EAGLE AND THE FOX

THE door was then thrown open and there was dead silence for a second or so. Marguerite could not see the door ; she held her breath, trying to imagine what was happening.

Percy Blakeney on entering had, of course, at once caught sight of the priest at the table ; his hesitation lasted less than five seconds ; the next moment Marguerite saw his tall figure crossing the room, while he called in a loud cheerful voice—

'Hello, there ! no one about ? Where's that fool Brogard ?'

He wore the magnificent coat and riding-suit which he had on when Marguerite last saw him at Richmond, so many hours ago. As usual, his dress was absolutely superb, the fine lace at his neck and wrists was spotless, his hands looked slender and white, his fair hair was carefully brushed and he carried his eyeglass with his usual affected gesture. In fact, at this moment, Sir Percy Blakeney, Baronet, might have been on his way to a garden-party at the Prince of Wales', instead of deliberately, cold-bloodedly running his head into a trap set for him by his deadliest enemy.

He stood for a moment in the middle of the room, while Marguerite, absolutely paralysed with horror, seemed

unable even to breathe. Then he walked quietly to the table, and, jovially clapping the priest on the back, said in his own drawling, affected way—

‘ Faith ! Er—Mister Chauvelin ! I vow I never thought of meeting you here.’

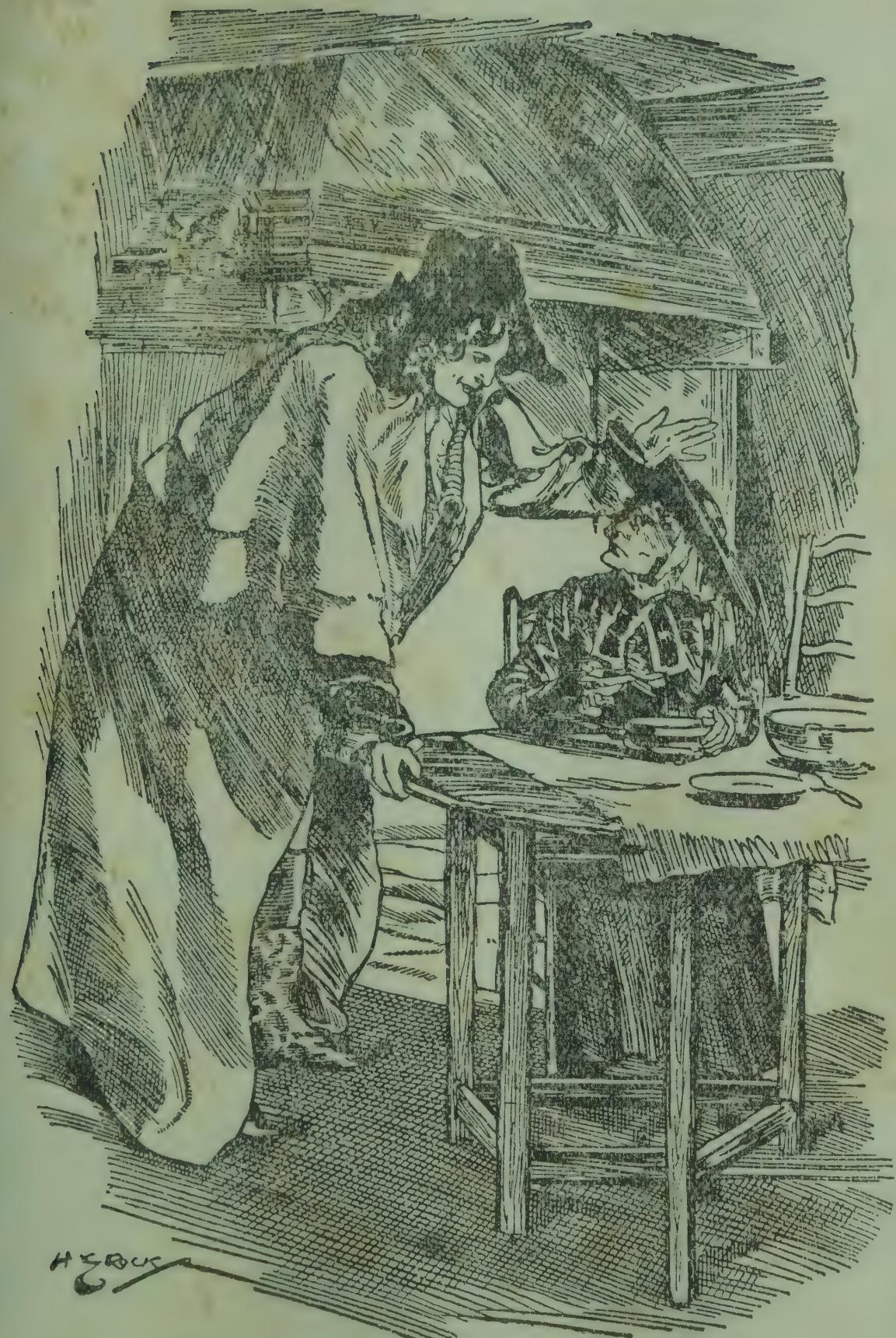
Chauvelin, who had been in the very act of conveying soup to his mouth, fairly choked. His thin face became absolutely purple, and a violent fit of coughing saved this cunning representative of France from betraying the most boundless surprise he had ever experienced. There was no doubt that this bold move on the part of the enemy had been wholly unexpected, so far as he was concerned ; and the daring impudence of it completely nonplussed him for the moment.

Obviously he had not taken the precaution of having the inn surrounded with soldiers. Blakeney had evidently guessed that much, and no doubt his resourceful brain had already formed some plan by which he could turn this unexpected interview to account. Marguerite up in the loft had not moved. She knew that if Percy now left the inn—in whatever direction—he could not go far without being sighted by some of Captain Jutley’s men on patrol. On the other hand, if he stayed, then Desgas would have time to come back with the half-dozen men Chauvelin had specially ordered. The trap was closing in, and Marguerite could do nothing but watch and wonder.

Blakeney meanwhile, with his foolish laugh and pleasant good nature, was solemnly patting Chauvelin on the back.

‘ I am so very sorry,’ he was saying cheerfully, ‘ so very sorry ! I seem to have upset you. Eating soup, too ! Nasty, awkward thing, soup ! A friend of mine died once—er—choked, just like you, with a spoonful of soup.’ And he smiled shyly, good-humouredly, down at Chauvelin.

‘ Faith ! ’ he continued, as soon as the latter had somewhat recovered himself, ‘ beastly hole this . . . isn’t it ? La ! you don’t mind ? ’ he added apologetically, as he sat down on a chair close to the table and drew the



'I VOW I NEVER THOUGHT OF MEETING YOU HERE!'

soup tureen towards him. ‘ That fool Brogard seems to be asleep or something.’ There was a second plate on the table, and he calmly helped himself to soup, then poured himself out a glass of wine.

For a moment Marguerite wondered what Chauvelin would do. His disguise was so good that perhaps he meant, on recovering himself, to deny his identity: but Chauvelin was too astute to make such an obviously false and childish move, and already he too had stretched out his hand and said pleasantly—‘ I am indeed charmed to see you, Sir Percy. You must excuse me—h’m—I thought you the other side of the Channel. Sudden surprise almost took my breath away.’

‘ La ! ’ said Sir Percy, with a good-humoured grin, ‘ it did quite, didn’t it—er—Mister—er—Chaubertin ? ’

‘ Pardon me—Chauvelin.’

‘ I beg pardon—a thousand times. Yes—Chauvelin of course. Er—I never could cotton to foreign names.’

He was calmly eating his soup, laughing with pleasant good humour, as if he had come all the way to Calais for the express purpose of enjoying supper at this filthy inn, in the company of his arch-enemy.

For the moment Marguerite wondered why Percy did not knock the little Frenchman down then and there—and no doubt something of the sort must have darted through his mind, for every now and then his lazy eyes seemed to flash, as they rested on the slight figure of Chauvelin—who had now quite recovered himself and was also calmly eating his soup.

But the keen brain, which had planned and carried through so many daring plots, was too far-seeing to take unnecessary risks. This place, after all, might be infested with spies; the innkeeper might be in Chauvelin’s pay. One call on Chauvelin’s part might bring twenty men about Blakeney’s ears for aught he knew, and he might be caught and trapped before he could help or, at least, warn the fugitives. This he would not risk; he meant to help the others, to get *them* safely away; for he had pledged his word to them, and his word he *would* keep.

And while he ate and chatted, he thought and planned. 'I didn't know,' he was saying jovially, 'that you were in holy orders.'

'I—er—hem—' stammered Chauvelin. The calm impudence of his antagonist had evidently thrown him off his usual balance.

'But, la ! I should have known you anywhere,' continued Sir Percy, placidly, as he poured himself out another glass of wine, 'although the wig and hat have changed you a bit.'

'Do you think so ? '

'La ! they alter a man so. But . . . begad ! I hope you don't mind my having made the remark ? Very bad form, making personal remarks ! I hope you don't mind ? '

'No, no, not at all—hem ! I hope Lady Blakeney is well,' said Chauvelin, hurriedly changing the conversation.

Blakeney, with much deliberation, finished his plate of soup, drank his glass of wine, and, momentarily, it seemed to Marguerite, glanced quickly all round the room.

'Quite well, thank you,' he said at last. There was a pause, during which Marguerite could watch these two antagonists who, evidently, in their minds were measuring themselves against one another. Chauvelin, who was trying to conceal his impatience beneath his urbane manner, took a quick look at his watch. Desgas should not be long : another two or three minutes, and this impudent Englishman would be secure in the keeping of half a dozen of Captain Jutley's most trusted men.

'You are on your way to Paris, Sir Percy ? ' he asked carelessly.

'Faith, no,' replied Blakeney, with a laugh. 'Only as far as Lille—not Paris for me. Beastly uncomfortable place Paris, just now for me—eh, Mister Chaubertin—beg pardon—Chauvelin ! '

'Not for an Englishman like youself, Sir Percy,' rejoined Chauvelin, sarcastically, 'who takes no interest in the conflict raging there.'

'La ! you see it's no business of mine. You are in a

hurry sir,' Blakeney added, as Chauvelin once again took out his watch; 'an appointment, perhaps? I pray you take no heed of me. My time's my own.' He rose from the table and dragged a chair to the hearth. Once more Marguerite was terribly tempted to go to him, for time was getting on; Desgas might be back at any moment with his men. Percy did not know that and—oh! how horrible it all was—and how helpless she felt!

'I am in no hurry,' continued Percy pleasantly, 'but, la! I don't want to spend any more time than I can help in this God-forsaken hole! But, sir,' he added, as Chauvelin had looked at his watch for the third time, 'that watch of yours won't go any faster for all the looking you give it. You are expecting a friend, maybe?'

'Aye—a friend!'

'Not a lady—I trust, my Lord Abbot,' laughed Blakeney. 'But, I say, come by the fire. It's getting wickedly cold.'

He kicked the fire with the heel of his boot, making the logs blaze in the old hearth. He seemed in no hurry to go, and apparently was quite unconscious of his immediate danger. He dragged another chair to the fire, and Chauvelin, whose impatience was by now quite beyond control, sat down beside the hearth, in such a way as to command a view of the door. Desgas had been gone nearly a quarter of an hour. It was quite plain to Marguerite's aching senses that, as soon as he arrived, Chauvelin would abandon all his other plans with regard to the fugitives, and capture this impudent Scarlet Pimpernel at once.

Blakeney continued meanwhile his airy chat. But Chauvelin was not listening. His every faculty was concentrated on that door through which presently Desgas would enter. Marguerite's thoughts, too, were centred there, for her ears had suddenly caught, through the stillness of the night, the sound of numerous and measured treads some distance away.

It was Desgas and his men. Another three minutes and they would be here! Another three minutes and the

awful thing would have occurred. The brave eagle would fall in the ferret's trap ! She would have moved now and screamed, but she dared not ; for while she heard the soldiers approaching, she was looking at Percy and watching his every movement. He was standing by the table whereon the remnants of the supper—plates, glasses, spoons, salt- and pepper-pots—were scattered pell-mell. His back was turned to Chauvelin and he was still prattling along in his own affected and foolish way, but from his pocket he had taken his snuff-box, and quickly and suddenly he emptied the contents of the pepper-pot into it.

Then he again turned with an idiotic laugh to Chauvelin :
' Eh ? Did you speak, sir ? '

Chauvelin had been too intent on listening to the sound of those approaching footsteps to notice what his cunning adversary had been doing. He now pulled himself together, trying to look unconcerned in the very midst of his anticipated triumph.

' No,' he said presently, ' that is—you were saying, Sir Percy—— ? '

' I was saying,' said Blakeney, going up to Chauvelin by the fire, ' that the Jew in Piccadilly has sold me better snuff this time than I have ever tasted. Will you honour me, my Lord Abbot ? '

He stood close to Chauvelin in his own careless, courtly way, holding out his snuff-box to his arch-enemy.

Chauvelin, who, as he told Marguerite once, had seen a trick or two in his day, had never dreamed of this one. With one ear fixed on those fast approaching footsteps, one eye turned to that door where Desgas and his men would presently appear, lulled into false security by the impudent Englishman's airy manner, he never even remotely guessed the trick which was being played upon him. He took a pinch of snuff.

Only one who has ever by accident sniffed vigorously a dose of pepper can have the faintest conception of the hopeless condition to which such a sniff will reduce any human being.

Chauvelin felt as if his head would burst—sneeze after

sneeze seemed nearly to choke him ; he was blind, deaf, and dumb for the moment, and during that moment Blakeney quietly, without the slightest haste, took up his hat, took some money out of his pocket, which he left on the table, then calmly stalked out of the room !

CHAPTER XXI .

THE JEW

IT took Marguerite some time to collect her scattered senses ; the whole of this last short episode had taken place in less than a minute, and Desgas and the soldiers were still about two hundred yards away from the 'Grey Cat'.

When she realized what had happened a curious mixture of joy and wonder filled her heart. It all was so neat, so ingenious. But how far could Percy go thus arrayed in his gorgeous clothes, without being sighted and followed ?

Now she blamed herself terribly for not having gone down to him sooner, and given him that word of warning and of love which, perhaps, after all, he needed. He could not know of the orders which Chauvelin had given for his capture, and even now perhaps . . .

But before all these horrible thoughts had taken concrete form in her brain, she heard the grounding of arms outside, close to the door, and Desgas' voice shouting 'Halt !' to his men.

Chauvelin had partially recovered ; his sneezing had become less violent, and he had struggled to his feet. He managed to reach the door just as Desgas' knock was heard on the outside. He threw open the door, and before his secretary could say a word, he had managed to stammer between two sneezes—

' The tall stranger—quick !—did any of you see him ? '

' Where, citizen ? ' asked Desgas, in surprise.

‘Here, man ! through that door ! not five minutes ago.’

‘We saw nothing, citizen ! The moon is not yet up, and . . .’

‘And you are just five minutes too late, my friend,’ said Chauvelin, with concentrated fury.

‘Citizen . . . I . . .’

‘You did what I ordered you to do,’ said Chauvelin, with impatience. ‘I know that, but you were a precious long time about it. Fortunately, there’s not much harm done, or it had fared ill with you, citizen Desgas.’

Desgas turned a little pale. There was so much rage and hatred in his superior’s whole attitude. ‘The tall stranger, citizen——’ he stammered.

‘Was here, in this room, five minutes ago, having supper at that table. Curse his impudence ! For obvious reasons, I dared not tackle him alone. Brogard is too big a fool, and that cursed Englishman appears to have the strength of a bullock, and so he slipped away under your very nose.’

‘He cannot go far without being sighted, citizen.’

‘Ah ?’

‘Captain Jutley sent forty men as reinforcements for the patrol duty : twenty went down to the beach. He again assured me that the watch had been constant all day, and that no stranger could possibly get to the beach, or reach a boat, without being sighted.’

‘That’s good. Do the men know their work ?’

‘They have had very clear orders : and I myself spoke to those who were about to start. They are to shadow—as secretly as possible—any stranger they may see, especially if he be tall, or stoop as if he would disguise his height.’

‘In no case to detain such a person, of course,’ said Chauvelin, eagerly. ‘That impudent Scarlet Pimpernel would slip through clumsy fingers. We must let him get to old Blanchard’s hut now ; there surround and capture him.’

‘The men understand that, citizen, and also that, as

soon as a tall stranger has been sighted, he must be shadowed, while one man is to turn straight back and report to you.'

'That is right,' said Chauvelin, rubbing his hands, well pleased.

'I have further news for you, citizen.'

'What is it?'

'A tall Englishman had a long conversation about three-quarters of an hour ago with a Jew, Reuben by name, who lives not ten paces from here.'

'Yes—and?' queried Chauvelin, impatiently.

'The conversation was all about a horse and cart, which the tall Englishman wished to hire, and which was to have been ready for him by eleven o'clock.'

'It is past that now. Where does this Reuben live?'

'A few minutes' walk from here.'

'Send one of the men to find out if the stranger has driven off in Reuben's cart.'

'Yes, citizen.'

Desgas went to give the necessary orders to one of the men. Not a word of this conversation between him and Chauvelin had escaped Marguerite, and every word they had spoken seemed to strike at her heart, with terrible hopelessness and dark foreboding. Blakeney could not now advance many steps, without spying eyes to track him. Her own helplessness struck her with a terrible sense of utter disappointment. The possibility of being of the slightest use to her husband had become almost nil, and her only hope rested in being allowed to share his fate, whatever it might ultimately be.

About five minutes later Desgas returned, followed by an elderly Jew in a dirty, threadbare gown. His red hair, which he wore after the fashion of Polish Jews, with corkscrew curls each side of his face, was plentifully sprinkled with grey—a general coating of grime about his cheeks and his chin gave him a peculiarly dirty and loathsome appearance. He had the habitual stoop which those of his race affected in past centuries, before the dawn of equality and freedom in matters of faith, and he walked

behind Desgas with the peculiar shuffling gait which has remained the characteristic of certain Jew traders in Europe to this day.

Chauvelin motioned to him to keep at a respectful distance. The group of the three men were standing just underneath the hanging oil-lamp, and Marguerite had a clear view of them all.

‘Is this the man?’ asked Chauvelin.

‘No, citizen,’ replied Desgas, ‘Reuben could not be found, so presumably his cart has gone with the stranger: but this man here seems to know something which he is willing to sell for a consideration.’

‘Ah!’ said Chauvelin, turning away with disgust from the loathsome specimen of humanity before him.

The Jew, with characteristic patience, stood humbly on one side, leaning on a thick knotted staff, his greasy, broad-brimmed hat casting a deep shadow over his grimy face, waiting for the noble Excellency to deign to put some questions to him.

‘The citizen tells me,’ said Chauvelin sternly to him, ‘that you know something of my friend, the tall Englishman, whom I desire to meet—keep your distance, man,’ he added hurriedly, as the Jew took a quick and eager step forward.

‘Yes, your Excellency,’ replied the Jew, who spoke with the peculiar lisp which denoted his origin, ‘I and Reuben Goldstein met a tall Englishman, on the road, close by here this evening.’

‘Did you speak to him?’

‘He spoke to us, your Excellency. He wanted to know if he could hire a horse and cart to go down along the St Martin road, to a place he wanted to reach tonight.’

‘What did you say?’

‘I did not say anything,’ said the Jew in an injured tone. ‘Reuben Goldstein, that accursed traitor . . .’

‘Cut that short, man,’ interrupted Chauvelin, roughly, ‘and go on with your story.’

‘He took the words out of my mouth, your Excellency; when I was about to offer the rich Englishman my horse

and cart, to take him wherever he chose, Reuben had already spoken, and offered his half-starved nag, and his broken-down cart.'

' And what did the Englishman do ? '

' He listened to Reuben Goldstein, your Excellency, and put his hand in his pocket then and there, and took out a handful of gold, which he showed to that descendant of Satan, telling him all that handful would be his if the horse and cart were ready for him by eleven o'clock.'

' And, of course, the horse and cart were ready ? '

' Well ! they were ready in a manner, so to speak, your Excellency. Reuben's nag was lame as usual ; she refused to budge at first. It was only after a time and with plenty of kicks, that she at last could be made to move,' said the Jew with a malicious chuckle.

' Then they started ? '

' Yes, they started about five minutes ago. I was disgusted with that stranger's folly. An Englishman, too ! He ought to have known Reuben's nag was not fit to drive.'

' But if he had no choice ? '

' No choice, your Excellency ? ' protested the Jew, in a rasping voice, ' did I not repeat to him a dozen times that my horse would take him more quickly and comfortably than Reuben's bag of bones ? He would not listen. Reuben is such a liar. The stranger was deceived. If he was in a hurry, he would have had better value for his money by taking my cart.'

' You have a horse and cart, too, then ? ' asked Chauvelin sternly.

' Aye ! that I have, your Excellency, and if your Excellency wants to drive . . .'

' Do you happen to know which way my friend went in Reuben Goldstein's cart ? '

Thoughtfully the Jew rubbed his dirty chin. Marguerite's heart was beating well-nigh to bursting. She had heard the stern question ; she looked anxiously at the Jew, but could not read his face beneath the shadow of his broad-brimmed hat. Vaguely she felt somehow

as if he held Percy's fate in his long, dirty hands. There was a long pause, whilst Chauvelin frowned impatiently at the stooping figure before him ; at last the Jew slowly put his hand in his breast pocket, and drew out a number of silver coins. He gazed at them thoughtfully, then remarked, in a quiet tone of voice—

‘ This is what the tall stranger gave me, when he drove away with Reuben, to hold my tongue about him and his doings.’

Chauvelin shrugged his shoulders impatiently. ‘ How much have you there ? ’ he asked.

‘ Twenty francs, your Excellency,’ replied the Jew, ‘ and I have been an honest man all my life.’

Chauvelin without further comment took a few pieces of gold out of his own pocket, and leaving them in the palm of his hand, he allowed them to jingle as he held them out towards the Jew. ‘ How many gold pieces are there in the palm of my hand ? ’ he asked quietly.

Evidently he had no desire to terrorize the man, but to conciliate him, for his own purposes, for his manner was pleasant and gentle. No doubt he feared that threats of the guillotine, and various other persuasive methods of that type, might addle the old man's brains, and that he would be more likely to be useful through greed of gain than through terror of death.

The eyes of the Jew shot a quick, keen glance at the gold. ‘ At least five, I should say, your Excellency,’ he replied.

‘ Enough, do you think, to loosen that honest tongue of yours ? ’

‘ What does your Excellency wish to know ? ’

‘ Whether your horse and cart can take me to where I can find my friend the tall stranger, who has driven off in Reuben Goldstein's cart ? ’

‘ My horse and cart can take your Honour there, when you please.’

‘ To a place called old Blanchard's hut ? ’

‘ Your Honour has guessed ? ’ said the Jew in astonishment.

‘ You know the place ? ’

‘ I know it, your Honour.’

‘ Which road leads to it ? ’

‘ The St Martin road, your Honour, then a footpath from there to the cliffs.’

‘ You know the road ? ’ repeated Chauvelin roughly.

‘ Every stone, every blade of grass, your Honour,’ replied the Jew quietly. Chauvelin without another word threw the five pieces of gold one by one before the Jew, who knelt down and on his hands and knees struggled to collect them. One rolled away, and he had some trouble to get it, for it had lodged underneath the dresser. Chauvelin quietly waited while the old man scrambled on the floor to find the piece of gold. When the Jew was again on his feet, Chauvelin said—

‘ How soon can your horse and cart be ready ? ’

‘ They are ready now, your Honour.’

‘ Where ? ’

‘ Not ten yards from this door. Will your Excellency deign to look ? ’

‘ I don’t want to see it. How far can you drive me in it ? ’

‘ As far as old Blanchard’s hut, your Honour, and farther than Reuben’s nag took your friend. I am sure that only a mile or two from here we shall come across that wily Reuben, his nag, his cart and the tall stranger all in a heap in the middle of the road.’

‘ How far is the nearest village from here ? ’

‘ On the road which the Englishman took, Miquelon is the nearest village, about five miles away.’

‘ There he could get fresh conveyance, if he wanted to go farther ? ’

‘ He could—if he ever got so far.’

‘ Can you ? ’

‘ Will your Excellency try ? ’ said the Jew simply.

‘ That is my intention,’ said Chauvelin very quietly, ‘ but remember, if you have deceived me, I shall tell two of my most stalwart soldiers to give you such a beating that your breath will perhaps leave your ugly body for

ever. But if we find my friend the tall Englishman, either on the road or at old Blanchard's hut, there will be ten more gold pieces for you. Do you accept the bargain ?'

The Jew again thoughtfully rubbed his chin. He looked at the money in his hand, then at his stern questioner, and at Desgas, who stood silently behind him all this while. After a moment's pause, he said deliberately—' I accept.'

' Go and wait outside then,' said Chauvelin, ' and remember to stick to your bargain, or by Heaven, I will keep to mine.'

With a final most abject bow, the old Jew shuffled out of the room. Chauvelin seemed pleased with his interview, for he rubbed his hands together, with that usual gesture of his, of malignant satisfaction. ' My coat and boots,' he said to Desgas at last.

Desgas went to the door, and apparently gave the necessary orders, for presently a soldier entered, carrying Chauvelin's coat, boots, and hat. He took off his cassock, beneath which he was wearing close-fitting breeches and a cloth waistcoat, and began changing his attire. ' You, citizen, in the meanwhile,' he said to Desgas, ' go back to Captain Jutley as fast as you can, and tell him to let you have another dozen men, and bring them with you along the St Martin road, where I dare say you will soon overtake the Jew's cart with myself in it. There will be hot work presently, if I mistake not, in old Blanchard's hut. We shall corner our game there, I'll warrant, for this impudent Scarlet Pimpernel has had the audacity—or the stupidity, I hardly know which—to adhere to his original plans. He has gone to meet de Tournay, St Just and the other traitors, which for the moment, I thought, perhaps, he did not intend to do. When we find them, there will be a band of desperate men at bay. Some of our men will, I presume, be put out of action. These royalists are good swordsmen, and the Englishman is devilish cunning, and looks very powerful. Still, we shall be five against one at least. You can follow the cart closely with your men, all along

the St Martin road, through Miquelon. The Englishman is ahead of us, and not likely to look behind him.'

While he gave these curt and concise orders, he had completed his change of attire, and was once more dressed in his usual dark, tight-fitting clothes. At last he took up his hat.

CHAPTER XXII

ON THE TRACK

NEVER for a moment did Marguerite Blakeney hesitate. Inside the inn, everything was still. Brogard and his wife, terrified of Chauvelin, had given no sign of life. She quietly slipped down the broken stairs, with her dark cloak closely round her, and out of the inn.

The night was dark enough at any rate to hide her figure from view, while her ears could keep her in touch with the cart going on ahead. She hoped by walking well within the shadow of the ditches which lined the road, that she would not be seen by Desgas' men, when they approached, or by the patrols.

The Jew's nag could not get on very fast, and though she was weary with mental fatigue and nerve strain, she knew that she could easily keep up with it, on a hilly road, where the poor beast—who was sure to be half-starved—would have to be allowed long and frequent rests. The road lay some distance from the sea, bordered on either side by shrubs and stunted trees, sparsely covered with foliage.

Fortunately, the moon showed no desire to peep between the clouds, and Marguerite was fairly safe from view. Everything around her was still: only from far, very far away, there came, like a long soft moan, the sound of the distant sea. She wondered at what particular spot, on this lonely coast, Percy could be at this moment. Not very far, surely, for he had had less than a quarter of an

hour's start of Chauvelin. She wondered if he knew that in this cool, ocean-scented bit of France there lurked many spies, all eager to sight his tall figure, to track him to where his unsuspecting friends waited for him, and then to close the net over him and them.

Chauvelin, on ahead, jolted and jostled in the Jew's vehicle, was nursing comfortable thoughts. He rubbed his hands together, with content, as he thought of the web which he had woven, and through which that daring Englishman could not hope to escape. The Jew's lean nag was going along at a slow jog trot, and her driver had to give her long and frequent halts.

'Are we a long way yet from Miquelon?' asked Chauvelin from time to time.

'Not very far, your Honour,' was always the reply.

'We have not yet come across your friend and mine, lying in a heap in the roadway,' was Chauvelin's sarcastic comment.

'Patience, noble Excellency,' rejoined the Jew, 'they are ahead of us. I can see the imprint of the cart wheels driven by that traitor.'

'You are sure of the road?'

'As sure as I am of the presence of those ten gold pieces in the noble Excellency's pocket, and which I trust will presently be mine.'

'As soon as I have shaken hands with my friend the tall stranger, they will certainly be yours.'

'Hark! what was that?' said the Jew suddenly.

Through the stillness, which had been absolute, there could now be heard distinctly the sound of horses' hoofs on the muddy road. 'Soldiers follow on!' he added, in an awed whisper.

'Stop a moment; I want to hear,' said Chauvelin.

Marguerite had also heard the sound of galloping hoofs, coming towards the cart, and towards herself. For some time she had been on the alert, thinking that Desgas and his squad would soon overtake them, but these came from the opposite direction, presumably from Miquelon. The darkness lent her sufficient cover. She had perceived that

the cart had stopped, and with utmost caution, treading noiselessly on the soft road, she crept a little nearer. She heard the quick words of challenge, then Chauvelin's quick query—'What news ?'

Two men on horseback had halted beside the vehicle. Marguerite could hear their voices, and the snorting of their horses, and now, behind her, some little distance off, the regular and measured tread of a body of advancing men : Desgas and his soldiers.

'You have seen the stranger ?' asked Chauvelin eagerly.

'No, citizen, we have seen no tall stranger ; we came by the edge of the cliff.'

'Then ?'

'Less than a mile beyond Miquelon, we came across a rough construction of wood, which looked like the hut of a fisherman, where he might keep his tools and nets. When we first sighted it, it seemed to be empty, and we thought there was nothing suspicious about it, until we saw some smoke issuing through a hole in the side. I dismounted and crept close to it. It was then empty, but in one corner of the hut there was a charcoal fire, and a couple of stools were also in the hut. I consulted with my comrades, and we decided that they should take cover with the horses, well out of sight, and that I should remain on the watch, which I did.'

'Well ! Did you see anything ?'

'About half an hour later, I heard voices, citizen, and presently two men came along towards the edge of the cliff ; they seemed to me to have come from the Lille road. One was young, the other quite old. They were talking in a whisper to one another, and I could not hear what they said.'

Marguerite's aching heart almost stopped beating as she listened : was the young one Armand her brother ?—and the old one de Tournay ?—were they the two fugitives who, unconsciously, were used as a decoy, to entrap their fearless and noble rescuer ?

'The two men presently went into the hut,' continued

the soldier, ' and I crept nearer. The hut is very roughly built, and I caught snatches of their conversation.'

' Yes ?—Quick !—What did you hear ?'

' The old man asked the young one if he were sure that was the right place. " Oh, yes," he replied, " it is the place sure enough," and by the light of the charcoal fire he showed his companion a paper which he carried. " Here is the plan," he said, " which he gave me before I left London. We were to stick closely to that plan, unless I had contrary orders, and I have had none. Here is the road we followed, see . . . here the fork . . . here we cut across the St Martin road . . . and here is the footpath which brought us to the edge of the cliff." I must have made a slight noise then, for the young man came to the door of the hut, and peered anxiously all round him. When he again joined his companion, they whispered so low that I could no longer hear them.'

' Well ? ' asked Chauvelin impatiently.

' There were six of us altogether, patrolling that part of the beach, so we consulted together, and thought it best that four should remain behind and keep the hut in sight, and I and my comrade rode back at once to make report of what we had seen.'

' You saw nothing of the tall stranger ? '

' Nothing, citizen.'

' If your comrades saw him, what would they do ? '

' Not lose sight of him for a moment, and if he showed signs of escape, or any boat came in sight, they would close in on him, and if necessary, they would shoot : the firing would bring the rest of the patrol to the spot. In any case they would not let the stranger go.'

' Aye ! but I do not want the stranger hurt—not just yet,' murmured Chauvelin savagely. ' Well, you've done your best. The Fates grant that I may not be too late.'

' We met half a dozen men just now, who have been patrolling this road for several hours.'

' Well ? '

' They have seen no stranger either.'

' Yet he is on ahead somewhere, in a cart or else . . .

Here ! there is not a moment to lose. How far is that hut from here ? '

‘ About five miles, citizen.’

‘ You can find it again ?—at once ?—without hesitation ? ’

‘ I have absolutely no doubt, citizen.’

‘ The footpath, to the edge of the cliff ?—Even in the dark ? ’

‘ It is not a dark night, citizen, and I know I can find my way,’ repeated the soldier firmly.

‘ Fall in behind, then. Let your comrade take both your horses back to Calais. You won’t want them. Keep beside the cart, and direct the Jew to drive straight ahead ; then stop him half a mile from the footpath ; see that he takes the most direct road.’

While Chauvelin spoke, Desgas and his men came up. All fell in noiselessly behind the cart, and slowly they all started down the dark road. Marguerite waited until she reckoned that they were well outside the range of earshot, then she, too, in the darkness, which suddenly seemed to have become more intense, crept noiselessly along.

CHAPTER XXIII

OLD BLANCHARD’S HUT

As in a dream, Marguerite followed on ; the net was drawing more and more tightly every moment round the beloved life, which had become dearer than all. To see her husband once again, to tell him how she had suffered, how much she had wronged, and how little understood him, had become now her only aim. She had abandoned all hope of saving him : she saw him gradually hemmed in on all sides, and, in despair, she gazed round her into the darkness, and wondered whence he would presently come, to fall into the death-trap which his relentless enemy had prepared for him.

She must have walked on almost in a trance, instinct alone keeping her up and guiding her in the wake of the enemy, when suddenly her ears, attuned to the slightest sound by that same blind instinct, told her that the cart had stopped, and that the soldiers had halted. They had come to their destination. No doubt on the right, somewhere close ahead, was the footpath that led to the edge of the cliff and to the hut.

Heedless of any risks, she crept quite close up to where Chauvelin stood, surrounded by his little troop : he had descended from the cart, and was giving some orders to the men. These she wanted to hear : what little chance she yet had of being useful to Percy consisted in hearing absolutely every word of his enemy's plans. Chauvelin and Desgas, followed by the soldiers, had turned off sharply to the right of the road, apparently on to the footpath which led to the cliffs. The Jew had remained on the road, with his cart and nag.

Marguerite, with infinite caution, crawling on her hands and knees, had also turned off to the right : to accomplish this she had to creep through the rough, low shrubs, trying to make as little noise as possible as she went along, tearing her face and hands against the dry twigs, intent only upon hearing without being seen or heard. Fortunately the footpath was bordered by a low, rough hedge, behind which was a dry ditch, filled with coarse grass. In this Marguerite managed to find shelter ; she was quite hidden from view, yet could contrive to get within three yards of where Chauvelin stood giving orders to his men.

‘Now,’ he was saying in a whisper, ‘where is the hut?’

‘About a quarter of a mile from here, along the footpath,’ said the soldier who had lately been directing the party, ‘and half-way down the cliff.’

‘Very good. You shall lead us. Before we begin to descend the cliff, you shall creep down to the hut, as noiselessly as possible, and ascertain if the traitor royalists are there. Do you understand?’

‘I understand, citizen.’

‘Now listen very attentively, all of you,’ continued Chauvelin impressively. ‘After this we may not be able to exchange another word, so remember every syllable I utter, as if your very lives depended on your memory. Perhaps they do,’ he added drily.

‘We listen, citizen,’ said Desgas, ‘and a soldier of the Republic never forgets an order.’

‘You, who have crept up to the hut, will try to peep inside. If an Englishman is there with those traitors, a man who is tall above the average, or who stoops as if he would disguise his height, then give a sharp, quick whistle as a signal to your comrades. All of you,’ he added, once more speaking to the soldiers collectively, ‘then quickly surround and rush into the hut, and each seize one of the men there, before they have time to draw their firearms; if any of them struggle, shoot at their legs or arms, but on no account kill the tall man. Do you understand?’

‘We understand, citizen.’

‘The man who is tall above the average, is probably also strong above the average: it will take four or five of you at least to overpower him.’ After a little pause, Chauvelin continued—

‘If the royalist traitors are still alone, which is more than likely, then warn your comrades who are lying in wait there, and all of you creep and take cover behind the rocks and boulders round the hut, and wait there, in dead silence, until the tall Englishman arrives; then only rush the hut, when he is safely inside. But remember that you must be as silent as the wolf is at night, when he prowls around the pens. I do not wish those royalists to be on the alert—the firing of a pistol, a shriek or call on their part would be sufficient, perhaps, to warn the tall personage to keep clear of the cliffs and of the hut, and,’ he added emphatically, ‘it is the tall Englishman whom it is your duty to capture tonight.’

‘You shall be implicitly obeyed, citizen.’

‘Then get along as noiselessly as possible, and I will follow you.’

‘What about the Jew, citizen?’ asked Desgas, as, like

noiseless shadows, one by one the soldiers began to creep along the rough and narrow footpath.

‘Ah, yes ! I had forgotten the Jew,’ said Chauvelin, and, turning towards the Jew, he called him angrily.

‘Here, you . . . whatever your confounded name may be,’ he said to the old man, who had quietly stood beside his lean nag, as far away from the soldiers as possible.

‘Benjamin Rosenbaum, so it please your Honour,’ he replied humbly.

‘It does not please me to hear your voice, but it does please me to give you certain orders, which you will find it wise to obey.’

‘Please, your Honour . . .’

‘Hold your tongue. You shall stay here—do you hear?—with your horse and cart until our return. You are on no account to utter the faintest sound, or to breathe even louder than you can help; nor are you, on any consideration whatever, to leave your post, until I give you orders to do so. Do you understand?’

‘But, your Honour . . .’ protested the Jew.

‘There is no question of “but” or of any argument,’ said Chauvelin, in a tone that made the timid old man tremble from head to foot. ‘If, when I return, I do not find you here, I most solemnly assure you that, wherever you may try and hide yourself, I can find you, and that punishment, swift, sure and terrible, will sooner or later overtake you. Do you hear me?’

‘But, your Excellency . . .’

‘I said, do you hear me?’

The soldiers had all crept away; the three men stood alone together in the dark and lonely road, with Marguerite there, behind the hedge, listening to Chauvelin’s orders, as she would to her own death sentence.

‘I heard, your Honour,’ protested the Jew again, while he tried to draw nearer to Chauvelin, ‘and I swear I will obey your Honour most absolutely, and that I will not move from this place until your Honour once more deigns to shed the light of your countenance upon your humble servant; but remember, your Honour, I am a poor old

man ; my nerves are not as strong as those of a young soldier. If midnight marauders come prowling round this lonely road, I might scream or run in my fright ! Is my life to be forfeit, is some terrible punishment to come on my poor old head for that which I cannot help ? '

The Jew seemed in real distress ; he was shaking from head to foot. Clearly he was not the man to be left by himself on this lonely road. The man spoke truly ; he might in sheer terror utter a shriek that might prove a warning to the Scarlet Pimpernel. Chauvelin reflected for a moment.

' Will your horse and cart be safe alone, here, do you think ? ' he asked roughly.

' I fancy, citizen,' here interposed Desgas, ' that they will be safer without that dirty, cowardly Jew, than with him. There seems no doubt that, if he gets scared, he will either make a bolt of it, or shriek his head off.'

' But what am I to do with the brute ? '

' Will you send him back to Calais, citizen ? '

' No, for we shall want him to drive back the wounded presently,' said Chauvelin.

There was a pause again—Desgas, waiting for the decision of his chief, and the old Jew, whining beside his nag.

' Well, you lazy old coward,' said Chauvelin at last, ' you had better shuffle along behind us. Here, citizen Desgas, tie this handkerchief tightly round the fellow's mouth.'

Chauvelin handed a scarf to Desgas, who solemnly began winding it round the Jew's mouth. Meekly Benjamin allowed himself to be gagged ; he evidently preferred this uncomfortable state to that of being left alone on the dark St Martin road. Then the three men fell in line.

' Quick ! ' said Chauvelin, impatiently, ' we have already wasted much valuable time.' And the firm footsteps of Chauvelin and Desgas, the shuffling gait of the old Jew, soon died away along the footpath.

Marguerite had not lost a single one of Chauvelin's

words of command. Her every nerve was strained first to grasp the situation, then to make a final appeal to those wits which had so often been called the sharpest in Europe, and which alone might be of service now. For the moment she could do nothing but follow the soldiers and Chauvelin. She feared to lose her way, or she would have rushed forward and found that wooden hut, and perhaps been in time to warn the fugitives and their brave deliverer.

For a second, the thought flashed through her mind of uttering the piercing shrieks, which Chauvelin seemed to dread, as a possible warning to the Scarlet Pimpernel and his friends—in the wild hope that they would hear, and have yet time to escape before it was too late. But she did not know how far from the edge of the cliff she was ; she did not know if her shrieks would reach the ears of the doomed men. Her effort might be premature, and she would never be allowed to make another. Her mouth would be securely gagged, like that of the Jew, and she a helpless prisoner in the hands of Chauvelin's men.

Like a ghost she flitted noiselessly behind the hedge : she had taken her shoes off, and her stockings were by now torn off her feet. She felt neither soreness nor weariness ; indomitable will to reach her husband, in spite of adverse Fate and a cunning enemy, killed all sense of bodily pain, and rendered her instincts doubly acute. She heard nothing save the soft and measured footsteps of Percy's enemies on in front ; she saw nothing but—in her mind's eye—that wooden hut, and her husband walking blindly to his doom.

Suddenly, her instinct made her pause in her mad haste, and cower still further within the shadow of the hedge. The moon, which had proved a friend to her by remaining hidden behind a bank of clouds, now emerged in all the glory of an early autumn night, and in a moment flooded the weird and lonely landscape with a rush of brilliant light. There, not two hundred yards ahead, was the edge of the cliff, and below, stretching far away to free and happy England, the sea rolled on smoothly and peaceably.

Marguerite's gaze rested for an instant on the brilliant, silvery waters, and as she gazed, her heart, which had been numb with pain for all these hours, seemed to soften and distend, and her eyes filled with hot tears: not three miles away, with white sails set, a graceful schooner lay in wait.

Marguerite had guessed rather than recognized her. It was the *Day Dream*, Percy's favourite yacht, with old Briggs, that prince of skippers, aboard, and all her crew of British sailors. Her white sails, glistening in the moonlight, seemed to convey a message to Marguerite of joy and hope, which yet she feared could never be. She waited there, out at sea, waited for her master, like a beautiful white bird all ready to take flight. Yet he would never reach her, never see her smooth deck again, never gaze any more on the white cliffs of England.

The sight of the schooner seemed to infuse into the poor, wearied woman the superhuman strength of despair. There was the edge of the cliff, and some way below was the hut, where, presently, her husband would meet his death. But the moon was out; she could see her way, now: she would see the hut from a distance, run to it, rouse them all, and warn them at any rate to be prepared to sell their lives dearly, rather than be caught like so many rats in a hole.

She stumbled on behind the hedge in the low, thick grass of the ditch. She must have run on very fast, and had outdistanced Chauvelin and Desgas, for presently she reached the edge of the cliff, and heard their footsteps distinctly behind her. But now the moonlight was full upon her, and her figure must have been distinctly outlined against the silvery background of the sea.

Only for a moment, though; the next she dropped to the ground. She peeped down the great rugged cliffs—the descent would be easy enough, as they were not precipitous, and the great boulders afforded plenty of foothold. Suddenly, as she gazed, she saw at some little distance on her left, and about midway down the cliffs, a rough wooden hut, through the walls of which a tiny

red light glimmered like a beacon. The eagerness of her joy was so great, that it felt like an awful pain. She could not gauge how distant the hut was, but without hesitation she began the steep descent, creeping from boulder to boulder, caring nothing for the enemy behind, or for the soldiers, who evidently had all taken cover, since the tall Englishman had not yet appeared.

On she pressed, forgetting the deadly foe on her track, running, stumbling, foot-sore, half-dazed, but still on—when, suddenly, a crevice, or stone, or slippery bit of rock, threw her violently to the ground. She struggled again to her feet, and started running forward once more to give them that timely warning, to beg them to flee before he came, and to tell him to keep away—away from this death-trap—away from this awful doom. But now she realized that other steps, quicker than her own, were already close at her heels. The next instant a hand dragged at her skirt, and she was down on her knees again, whilst something was wound round her mouth to prevent her uttering a scream.

Bewildered, half frantic with the bitterness of disappointment, she looked round her helplessly, and, bending down quite close to her, she saw through the mist, which seemed to gather round her, a pair of keen, malicious eyes. She lay in the shadow of a great boulder; Chauvelin could not see her features, but he passed his thin, white fingers over her face.

‘A woman!’ he whispered excitedly. ‘We cannot let her loose, that’s certain. I wonder now . . .’

Suddenly he paused, and after a few seconds of deadly silence, he gave forth a long, low curious chuckle, while once again Marguerite felt, with a horrible shudder, his thin fingers wandering over her face. ‘Dear me! dear me!’ he whispered, with affected gallantry, ‘this is indeed a charming surprise!’

Her senses were leaving her; half choked with the tight grip round her mouth, she had no strength to move or to utter the faintest sound. The excitement which all along had kept up her delicate body, seemed at once to have

subsided, and the feeling of blank despair to have completely paralysed her brain and nerves. Chauvelin must have given some directions, which she was too dazed to hear, for she felt herself lifted from off her feet ; the bandage round her mouth was made more secure, and a pair of strong arms carried her toward that tiny, red light, on ahead, which she had looked upon as a beacon and the last faint glimmer of hope.

CHAPTER XXIV

TRAPPED

WHEN Marguerite recovered consciousness, she felt that she was placed with some degree of comfort upon a man's coat, with her back resting against a fragment of rock. The moon was hidden again behind some clouds, and the darkness seemed in comparison more intense. The sea was roaring some two hundred feet below her, and on looking all round she could no longer see the tiny glimmer of red light. That the end of the journey had been reached, she gathered from the fact that she heard rapid questions and answers spoken in a whisper quite close to her.)

‘ There are four men in there, citizen ; they are sitting by the fire, and seem to be waiting quietly.’

‘ The time ? ’

‘ Nearly two o'clock.’

‘ The tide ? ’

‘ Coming in quickly.’

‘ The schooner ? ’

‘ Obviously an English one, lying some two miles out. But we cannot see her boat.’

‘ Have the men taken cover ? ’

‘ Yes, citizen.’

‘ They will not blunder ? ’

‘They will not stir until the tall Englishman comes ; then they will surround and overpower the five men.’

‘Right. And the lady ?’

‘Still dazed, I fancy. She’s close beside you, citizen.

‘And the Jew ?’

‘He’s gagged, and his legs strapped together. He cannot move or scream.’

‘Good. Then have your gun ready, in case you want it. Get close to the hut and leave me to look after the lady.’

Desgas evidently obeyed, for Marguerite heard him creeping away along the stony cliff, then she felt that a pair of warm, thin, claw-like hands took hold of both of her own, and held them in a grip of steel.

‘Before that handkerchief is removed from your mouth, fair lady,’ whispered Chauvelin close to her ear, ‘I think it right to give you one small word of warning. What has procured me the honour of being followed across the Channel by so charming a companion, I cannot, of course, conceive, but, if I mistake not, the purpose of this flattering attention is not one that would commend itself to my vanity. I think that I am right in surmising, moreover, that the first sound which your pretty lips would utter, if the cruel gag were removed, would be one that might perhaps prove a warning to the cunning fox, which I have been at such pains to track to his lair.’

He paused a moment, while the steel-like grasp seemed to tighten round her wrist ; then he resumed in the same hurried whisper—‘Inside that hut, if again I am not mistaken, your brother, Armand St Just, waits with that traitor de Tournay, and two other men unknown to you, for the arrival of the mysterious rescuer, whose identity has for so long puzzled our Committee of Public Safety—the audacious Scarlet Pimpernel. No doubt if you scream, if there is a scuffle here, if shots are fired, it is more than likely that the same long legs that brought this scarlet enigma here, will as quickly take him to some place of safety. The purpose, then, for which I have travelled all these miles, will remain unaccomplished. On the other hand, it only rests with yourself that your brother

Armand shall be free to go off with you tonight if you like, to England, or any other place of safety.'

Marguerite could not utter a sound, as the handkerchief was wound very tightly round her mouth, but Chauvelin was peering through the darkness very closely into her face ; no doubt, too, her hand gave a responsive appeal to his last suggestion, for presently he continued—

‘ What I want you to do to ensure Armand’s safety is a very simple thing, dear lady.’

‘ What is it ? ’ Marguerite’s hand seemed to convey to his, in response.

‘ To remain—on this spot, without uttering a sound, until I give you leave to speak. Ah ! but I think you will obey,’ he added, with that funny dry chuckle of his, as Marguerite’s whole figure seemed to stiffen, in defiance of this order, ‘ for let me tell you that if you scream, nay ! if you utter one sound, or attempt to move from here, my men—there are thirty of them about—will seize St Just, de Tournay, and their two friends, and shoot them here—by my orders—before your eyes.’

She could not see Chauvelin, but she could almost feel those keen, pale eyes of his fixed maliciously upon her helpless form, and his hurried, whispered words reached her ear, as the death-knell of her last faint, lingering hope.

‘ Nay, fair lady,’ he added smoothly, ‘ you can have no interest in any one save St Just, and all you need do for his safety is to remain where you are, and to keep silent. My men have strict orders to spare him in every way. As for that Scarlet Pimpernel, what is he to you ? Believe me, no warning from you could possibly save him. And now, dear lady, I will remove this unpleasant gag which has been placed on your pretty mouth. You see I wish you to be perfectly free in the choice which you are about to make.’

Chauvelin then removed the handkerchief. She certainly did not scream : at that moment, she had not strength to do anything but barely to hold herself upright, and to force herself to think. Oh ! what should she do ? Why should she not with unearthly screams, that would

re-echo from one end of the lonely beach to the other, send out a warning to him to stop and retrace his steps, for death lurked here while he advanced ? Once or twice the screams rose to her throat—as if by instinct : then, before her eyes there stood the awful alternative : her brother and those three men shot before her eyes, practically by her orders : she their murderer.

She could not give that signal—for she was weak, and she was a woman. How could she deliberately order Armand to be shot before her eyes, to have his dear blood upon her head, he dying perhaps with a curse on her upon his lips ? And little Suzanne's father, too ! he, an old man ! and the others !—oh ! it was all too horrible. Then should she wait ? But how long ? The early morning hours sped on, and yet it was not dawn : the sea continued its incessant mournful murmur, the autumnal breeze sighed gently in the night : the lonely beach was silent, even as the grave.

(Suddenly from somewhere, not very far away, a cheerful strong voice was heard singing 'God save the King' !

CHAPTER XXV

THE SCHOONER

MARGUERITE'S aching heart stood still. She felt, more than she heard, the men on the watch preparing for the fight. Her senses told her that each, with sword in hand, was crouching, ready for the spring.

The voice came nearer and nearer ; in the vast immensity of these lonely cliffs, with the loud murmur of the sea below, it was impossible to say how near, or how far, or from which direction came that cheerful singer, who sang to God to save his King, whilst he himself was in such deadly danger. Faint at first, the voice grew louder and louder ; from time to time a small pebble detached itself apparently from beneath the firm tread of the singer, and went rolling down the rocky cliffs to the beach below.

Marguerite, as she heard, felt that her very life was slipping away, as if when the voice drew nearer, when the singer became entrapped . . . She distinctly heard the click of Desgas' gun close to her.

No ! no ! Oh, God in heaven ! this cannot be ! let Armand's blood then be upon her own head ! let her be branded as his murderer ! let even he, whom she loved, despise and loathe her for this, but God ! oh God ! save my husband at any cost !

With a wild shriek, she sprang to her feet, and darted round the rock, against which she had been cowering. She saw the red gleam through the chinks of the hut ; she ran up to it and fell against its wooden walls, which she began to hammer with clenched fists in a mad fever, while she shouted—‘ Armand ! Armand ! for God's sake, fire ! your leader is near ! he is coming ! he is betrayed ! Armand ! Armand ! fire in Heaven's name ! ’

She was seized and thrown to the ground. She lay there moaning, bruised, not caring, but still half-sobbing, half-shrieking—‘ Percy, my husband, for God's sake fly ! Armand ! Armand ! why don't you fire ? ’

‘ One of you stop that woman screaming,’ hissed Chauvelin, who could hardly refrain from striking her. Something was thrown over her face ; she could not breathe, and perforce she was silent.

The bold singer, too, had become silent, warned, no doubt, of his impending danger by Marguerite's frantic shrieks. The men had sprung to their feet, there was no need for further silence on their part ; the very cliffs echoed the poor, heartbroken woman's screams.

Chauvelin, with a muttered oath, which boded no good to her who had dared upset his most cherished plans, had hastily shouted the word of command—‘ Into it, men, and let no one escape from that hut alive ! ’

The moon had once more emerged from between the clouds : the darkness on the cliffs had gone, giving place once more to brilliant, silvery light. Some of the soldiers had rushed to the rough, wooden door of the hut, while one of them kept guard over Marguerite. The door was

half open ; one of the soldiers pushed it farther, but inside all was darkness, the charcoal fire only lighting with a dim, red light the farthest corner of the hut. The soldiers paused at the door, waiting for further orders.

Chauvelin, who was prepared for a vigorous resistance from the four fugitives under cover of the darkness, was for the moment paralysed with astonishment when he saw the soldiers standing there at attention, like sentries on guard, while not a sound proceeded from the hut. Filled with strange, anxious foreboding, he, too, went to the door of the hut, and peering into the gloom, he asked quickly—‘ What is the meaning of this ? ’

‘ I think, citizen, that there is no one there now,’ replied one of the soldiers.

‘ You have not let those four men go ? ’ thundered Chauvelin. ‘ I ordered you to let no man escape alive !—Quick, after them, all of you ! Quick, in every direction ! ’ The men, obedient as machines, rushed down the rocky incline towards the beach, some going off to right and left, as fast as their feet could carry them.

‘ You and your men will pay with your lives for this blunder,’ said Chauvelin angrily to the sergeant who had been in charge of the men ; ‘ and you too, citizen,’ he added, turning with a snarl to Desgas, ‘ for disobeying my orders.’

‘ You ordered us to wait, citizen, until the tall Englishman arrived and joined the four men in the hut. No one came,’ said the sergeant sullenly.

‘ But I ordered you just now, when the woman screamed, to rush in, and let no one escape.’

‘ But, citizen, the four men who were there before had been gone some time, I think.’

‘ You think ! ’ said Chauvelin, almost choking with fury, ‘ and you let them go ! ’

‘ You ordered us to wait, citizen,’ protested the sergeant, ‘ and to obey your commands implicitly on pain of death. We waited.’

‘ I heard the men creep out of the hut, not many minutes after we took cover, and long before the woman

screamed,' he added, as Chauvelin seemed still quite speechless with rage.

‘ Hark ! ’ said Desgas suddenly.

In the distance the sound of repeated firing was heard. Chauvelin tried to peer along the beach below, but as luck would have it, the fitful moon once more hid her light behind a bank of clouds, and he could see nothing. ‘ One of you go into the hut and strike a light,’ he stammered at last.

Stolidly the sergeant obeyed : he went up to the charcoal fire and lit the small lantern he carried in his belt ; it was evident that the hut was quite empty.

‘ Which way did they go ? ’ asked Chauvelin.

‘ I could not tell, citizen,’ said the sergeant ; ‘ they went straight down the cliff first, then disappeared behind some boulders.’

‘ Hush ! what was that ? ’

All three men listened attentively. In the very far distance could be heard faintly echoing and already dying away, the quick, sharp splash of half a dozen oars. Chauvelin took out his handkerchief and wiped the perspiration from his forehead. ‘ The schooner’s boat ! ’ was all he gasped.

Evidently Armand St Just and his three companions had managed to creep along the side of the cliffs, while the men, like true soldiers of the well-drilled Republican army, had with blind obedience, and in fear of their lives, implicitly obeyed Chauvelin’s orders—to wait for the tall Englishman, who was the important capture.

They had no doubt reached one of the creeks which jut far out to sea on this coast at intervals ; behind this, the boat of the *Day Dream* must have been on the look-out for them ; and they were by now safely on board the British schooner. As if to confirm this last supposition, the dull boom of a gun was heard from out at sea.

‘ The schooner, citizen,’ said Desgas, quietly ; ‘ she’s off.’

It needed all Chauvelin’s presence of mind not to give way to a useless and undignified access of rage. There

was no doubt now, that once again, that accursed British head had completely outwitted him. How he had contrived to reach the hut without being seen by one of thirty soldiers who guarded the spot, was more than Chauvelin could conceive. That he had done so before the thirty men had arrived on the cliff was, of course, fairly clear, but how he had come over in Reuben's cart, all the way from Calais, without being sighted by the various patrols on duty, was impossible of explanation. It really seemed as if some potent Fate watched over that daring Scarlet Pimpernel, and his astute enemy almost felt a superstitious shudder pass through him as he looked round at the towering cliffs, and the loneliness of this outlying coast.

But surely this was reality ! Chauvelin and his thirty men had all heard with their own ears that accursed voice singing ' God save the King ' fully twenty minutes after they had all taken cover around the hut ; by that time the four fugitives must have reached the creek, and got into the boat, and the nearest creek was more than a mile from the hut. Where had that daring singer got to ? Unless Satan himself had lent him wings he could not have covered that mile on a rocky cliff in the space of two minutes ; and only two minutes had elapsed between his song and the sound of the boat's oars away at sea. He must have remained behind, and was even now hiding somewhere about the cliffs ; the patrols were still about, he would still be sighted, no doubt. Chauvelin felt hopeful once again.

One or two of the men, who had run after the fugitives, were now slowly working their way up the cliff : one of them reached Chauvelin's side at the very moment that this hope arose in his heart.)

' We were too late, citizen,' the soldier said, ' we reached the beach just before the moon was hidden by that bank of clouds. The boat had undoubtedly been on the look-out behind that first creek, a mile off, but she had shoved off some time ago, when we got to the beach, and was already some way out to sea. We fired after her, but,

of course, it was no good. She was making straight and quickly for the schooner. We saw her very clearly in the moonlight.'

'Yes,' said Chauvelin, with eager impatience, 'she had shov'd off some time ago, you said, and the nearest creek is a mile farther on.'

'Yes, citizen ! I ran all the way, straight to the beach, though I guessed the boat would have waited somewhere near the creek, as the tide would reach there earliest. The boat must have shov'd off some minutes before the woman began to scream.'

Some minutes before the woman began to scream ! Then Chauvelin's hopes had not deceived him. The Scarlet Pimpernel might have contrived to send the fugitives on ahead by the boat, but he himself had not had time to reach it ; he was still on shore, and all the roads were well patrolled. At any rate, all was not yet lost, and would not be, while that impudent Britisher was still on French soil.

'Bring the light in here !' he commanded eagerly, as he once more entered the hut. The sergeant brought his lantern, and together the two men explored the little place: with a rapid glance Chauvelin noted its contents : the stove placed against the wall, and containing the last few dying embers of burned charcoal, a couple of stools, overturned as if in the haste of sudden departure ; then the fisherman's tools and his nets lying in one corner, and beside them, something small and white. 'Pick that up,' said Chauvelin to the sergeant, pointing to this white scrap, 'and bring it to me.'

It was a crumpled piece of paper, evidently dropped by the fugitives, in their hurry to get away. The sergeant, much awed by Chauvelin's obvious rage and impatience, picked the paper up and handed it respectfully to him.

'Read it, sergeant,' said the latter curtly.

'It is almost illegible, citizen—a fearful scrawl . . .'

'I ordered you to read it,' repeated Chauvelin angrily.

The sergeant, by the light of his lantern, began to puzzle out the few hastily scrawled words.

‘ I cannot quite reach you, without risking your lives and endangering the success of your rescue. When you receive this, wait two minutes, then creep out of the hut one by one, turn to your left sharply, and creep cautiously down the cliff ; keep to the left all the time, till you reach the first rock, which you see jutting far out to sea—behind it in the creek the boat is on the look-out for you—give a long, sharp whistle—she will come up—get into her—my men will row you to the schooner, and thence to England and safety—once on board the *Day Dream* send the boat back for me. Tell my men that I shall be at the creek which is in a direct line opposite the “Grey Cat” near Calais. They know it. I shall be there as soon as possible—they must wait for me at a safe distance out at sea, till they hear the usual signal. Do not delay—and obey these instructions implicitly.’

‘ Then there is the signature, citizen,’ added the sergeant, as he handed the paper back to Chauvelin.

But the latter had not waited an instant. One phrase of the momentous scrawl had caught his ear. ‘ I shall be at the creek which is in a direct line opposite the “Grey Cat” near Calais’ : that phrase might yet mean victory for him.

‘ Which of you knows this coast well ? ’ he shouted to his men who now one by one had all returned from their fruitless run, and were assembled once more round the hut.

‘ I do, citizen,’ said one of them. ‘ I was born in Calais, and know every stone of these cliffs.’

‘ There is a creek in a direct line from the “Grey Cat” ? ’

‘ There is, citizen. I know it well.’

‘ The Englishman is hoping to reach that creek. He does *not* know every stone of these cliffs ; he may go there by the longest way round, and in any case he will proceed cautiously for fear of the patrols. There is a chance to get him yet. A thousand francs to each man who gets to that creek before that long-legged Englishman.’

‘ I know a short cut across the cliffs,’ said the soldier,

and with an enthusiastic shout he rushed forward, followed closely by his comrades. Within a few minutes their running footsteps had died away in the distance. Chauvelin listened to them for a moment ; the promise of reward was adding speed to the soldiers of the Republic. The gleam of hate and anticipated triumph was once more apparent on his face.

Close to him Desgas still stood in silence, waiting for further orders, whilst two soldiers were kneeling beside the prostrate form of Marguerite. Chauvelin gave his secretary an evil look. His well-laid plan had failed ; its sequel was doubtful ; there was a great chance now that the Scarlet Pimpernel might yet escape, and Chauvelin, with that unreasoning fury which sometimes assails a strong nature, was longing to vent his rage on somebody.

The soldiers were holding Marguerite to the ground, though she, poor soul, was not making the faintest struggle. Overwrought nature had at last asserted itself, and she lay there in a dead swoon : her eyes circled by deep purple lines, her hair matted and damp round her forehead, her lips parted in a sharp curve that spoke of physical pain.

‘ It is no use mounting guard over a woman who is half dead,’ said Chauvelin spitefully to the soldiers, ‘ when you have allowed five men who were very much alive to escape.’

Obediently the soldiers rose to their feet.

‘ You’d better try and find that footpath again for me, and that broken-down cart we left on the road.’ Then suddenly a bright idea seemed to strike him.

‘ Ah ! by the by ! where is the Jew ? ’

‘ Close by here, citizen,’ said Desgas ; ‘ I gagged him and tied his legs together as you commanded.’

From close at hand, a plaintive moan reached Chauvelin’s ears. He followed his secretary, who led the way to the other side of the hut, where, fallen into an absolute heap of dejection, with his legs tightly tied together and his mouth gagged, lay the unfortunate Jew. His face in the silvery light of the moon looked positively ghastly

with terror: his whole body was trembling, as if with fever, while a piteous wail escaped his lips. The rope which had originally been wound round his shoulders and arms had evidently given way, for it lay in a tangle about his body, but he seemed quite unconscious of this, for he had not made the slightest attempt to move from the place where Desgas had originally put him.

‘Bring the cowardly creature here,’ commanded Chauvelin. He certainly felt exceedingly angry, and since he had no reasonable grounds for venting his ill-humour on the soldiers who had but too exactly obeyed his orders, he felt that the Jew would prove an excellent butt. He would not go too near him, but said with biting sarcasm, as the wretched old man was brought into the full light of the moon by the two soldiers—

‘I suppose now, that being a Jew, you have a good memory for bargains? Answer!’ he again commanded, as the Jew with trembling lips seemed too frightened to speak.

‘Yes, your Honour,’ stammered the poor wretch.

‘You remember, then, the one you and I made together in Calais, when you undertook to overtake Reuben Goldstein, his nag and my friend the tall stranger? Eh?’

‘B—b—but—your Honour . . .’

‘There is no “but”, I said, do you remember?’

‘Y—y—y—yes, your Honour!’

‘What was the bargain?’

There was dead silence. The unfortunate man looked round at the great cliffs, the moon above, the stolid faces of the soldiers, and even at the poor unconscious woman lying close by, but said nothing.

‘Will you speak?’ thundered Chauvelin.

He did try, poor wretch, but, obviously, he could not. There was no doubt that he knew what to expect from the stern man before him.

‘Your Honour . . .’ he began timidly.

‘Since your terror seems to have paralysed your tongue,’ said Chauvelin sarcastically, ‘I must needs refresh your memory. It was agreed between us that if we

overtook my friend the tall stranger, before he reached this place, you were to have ten pieces of gold.'

A low moan escaped from the Jew's trembling lips.

'But,' added Chauvelin, with slow emphasis, 'if you deceived me in your promise, you were to have a sound beating, one that would teach you not to tell lies.'

'I did not, your Honour; I swear it . . .'

'Now, you did not fulfil your share of the bargain, but I am ready to fulfil mine. Here,' he added, turning to the soldiers, 'the buckle-end of your two belts to this confounded Jew.'

As the soldiers obediently unbuckled their heavy leather belts, the Jew set up a most pitiful and desperate howl.

'I think I can rely on you, men,' laughed Chauvelin maliciously, 'to give this old liar the best and soundest beating he has ever had. But don't kill him,' he added drily.

'We will obey, citizen,' replied the soldiers, as unmoved as ever.

'When that old coward has had his punishment,' he said to Desgas, 'the men can guide us as far as the cart, and one of them can drive us in it back to Calais. The Jew and the woman can look after each other,' he added roughly, 'until we can send somebody for them in the morning. They can't run away very far, in their present condition, and we cannot be troubled with them just now.'

Chauvelin had not given up all hope. His men, he knew, were spurred on by the hope of the reward. That audacious Scarlet Pimpernel, alone and with thirty men at his heels, could not reasonably be expected to escape a second time. But he felt less sure now: the Englishman's audacity had baffled him once, while the wooden-headed stupidity of the soldiers, and the interference of a woman had turned his hand, which held all the trumps, into a losing one.

The howls of the Jew behind him, undergoing his punishment, sent a balm through his heart, overburdened as it was with revengeful malice. He smiled. It eased

his mind to think that some human being at least was, like himself, not altogether at peace with mankind.

‘That will do,’ commanded Chauvelin, as the Jew’s moans became more feeble, and the poor wretch seemed to have fainted away, ‘we don’t want to kill him.’ Obediently the soldiers buckled on their belts, one of them angrily kicking the Jew to one side.

‘Leave him there,’ said Chauvelin, ‘and lead the way now quickly to the cart. I’ll follow.’ He walked up to where Marguerite lay, and looked down into her face. She had evidently recovered consciousness, and was making feeble efforts to raise herself. Her large, blue eyes were looking at the moonlit scene round her with a scared and terrified look; they rested with a mixture of horror and pity on the Jew, whose luckless fate and wild howls had been the first signs that struck her, with her returning senses; then she caught sight of Chauvelin in his neat, dark clothes, which seemed hardly crumpled after the stirring events of the last few hours. He was smiling sarcastically, and his pale eyes peered down at her with a look of intense malice.

‘I much regret, fair lady,’ he said in his most courtly tones, ‘that circumstances, over which I have no control, compel me to leave you here for the moment. But I go away, secure in the knowledge that I do not leave you unprotected. Our friend Benjamin here, though a trifle the worse for wear at the present moment, will prove a gallant defender of your fair person, I have no doubt. At dawn I will send an escort for you: until then, I feel sure that you will find him devoted, though perhaps a trifle slow.’ And, with a last evil smile and courtly bow, he disappeared down the footpath after the soldiers, followed by Desgas.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE ESCAPE

MARGUERITE listened—half-dazed as she was—to the fast-retreating, firm footsteps of the four men. The invigorating scent of the sea was nectar to her wearied body ; the immensity of the lonely cliffs was silent and dreamlike. Her brain only remained conscious of its ceaseless, its intolerable torture of uncertainty.

Suddenly . . . a sound . . . the strangest, undoubtedly, that these lonely cliffs of France had ever heard, broke the silent solemnity of the shore.

It was the sound of downright, solid, absolutely British swearing !

Marguerite did not trust her ears. Half-raising herself on her hands, she strained every sense to see or hear, to know the meaning of this very earthly sound. All was still again for the space of a few seconds ; the same silence once more fell upon the great and lonely vastness.

Then Marguerite, who had listened as in a trance, who felt she must be dreaming with that cool, magnetic moonlight overhead, heard it again ; and this time her heart stood still, her eyes large and dilated, looked round her, not daring to trust to her other senses.

‘ Faith ! but I wish those accursed fellows had not hit quite so hard ! I’m as weak as a rat ! ’

This time it was quite unmistakable: only one particular pair of essentially British lips could have uttered those words, in such sleepy, drawling, affected tones.

In a moment Marguerite was on her feet. She looked round her eagerly at the tall cliffs, the lonely hut, the great stretch of rocky beach. Somewhere above or below her, behind a boulder or inside a crevice, but still hidden from her longing, feverish eyes, must be the owner of that voice, which once used to irritate her, but which

now would make her the happiest woman in Europe, if only she could locate it. 'Percy! Percy!' she cried hysterically, tortured between doubt and hope, 'I am here! Come to me! Where are you? Percy! Percy!'

'It's all very well calling me, my dear!' said the same sleepy, drawling voice, 'but, faith! I cannot come to you. Those beastly frog-eaters have trussed me like a goose, and I am as weak as a mouse. I cannot get away.'

And still Marguerite did not understand. She did not realize for at least another ten seconds whence came that voice, so drawling, so dear, but alas! with a strange accent of weakness and of suffering. There was no one within sight—except by that rock . . . Great God! . . . the Jew! . . . was she mad or ~~dreaming~~?

His back was against the pale moonlight, he was half-crouching, trying vainly to raise himself with his arms tightly tied. Marguerite ran up to him, took his head in both her hands, and looked straight into a pair of blue—yes, good-natured, even a trifle amused—shining out of the distorted mask of the Jew.

'Percy! Percy! my husband!' she gasped, faint with the fullness of her joy. 'Thank God! Thank God!'

'La! my dear,' he rejoined good-humouredly, 'we will both do that in a minute, if you can loosen these cursed ropes, and release me from my inelegant attitude.'

She had no knife; her fingers were numb and weak; but she worked away with her teeth, while great welcome tears poured from her eyes on to those poor, bound hands.

'Faith!' he said, when at last, after frantic efforts on her part, the ropes seemed at last to be giving way, 'but I marvel whether it has ever happened before, that an Englishman allowed himself to be licked and made no attempt to give as good as he got.'

It was very obvious that he was exhausted from sheer physical pain, and when at last the rope gave way, he fell in a heap against the rock. Marguerite looked helplessly round her. 'Oh! for a drop of water on this awful beach!' she cried in agony, seeing that he was ready to faint again.

'Nay, my dear,' he murmured with his cheerful smile. 'Personally I should prefer a drop of good French brandy! If you'll dive in the pocket of this dirty old garment, you'll find my flask. I can't move an inch myself.'

When he had drunk some brandy, he forced Marguerite to do likewise. 'La! that's better now! Eh! little woman!' he said with a sigh of satisfaction. 'Heigh-ho! but this is a queer rig-up for Sir Percy Blakeney, Baronet, to be found in by his lady, and no mistake. Begad!' he added, passing his hand over his chin, 'I haven't been shaved for nearly twenty hours: I must look a disgusting object. As for these curls—' And laughingly he took off the disfiguring wig and curls, and stretched out his long limbs, which were cramped from many hours' stooping. Then he bent forward and looked long and searchingly into his wife's blue eyes.

'Percy,' she whispered, while a deep blush suffused her delicate cheeks and neck, 'if you only knew . . .'

'I do know, dear—everything,' he said with infinite gentleness.

'And can you ever forgive?'

'I have nothing to forgive, sweetheart; your heroism, your devotion, which I, alas! so little deserved, have more than atoned for that unfortunate episode at the ball.'

'Then you knew?' she whispered, 'all the time.'

'Yes!' he replied tenderly, 'I knew—all the time. But begad! had I but known what a noble heart yours was, my Margot, I should have trusted you, as you deserved to be trusted, and you would not have had to undergo the terrible sufferings of the past few hours, in order to run after a husband, who has done so much that needs forgiveness.'

They were sitting side by side, leaning up against a rock, and he had rested his aching head on her shoulder. She certainly now deserved the name of 'the happiest woman in Europe'.

'It is a case of the blind leading the lame, sweet'heart, is it not?' he said with his familiar good-natured smile.

‘ Faith ! but I do not know which are the more sore, my shoulders or your little feet.’

‘ But Armand ? ’ she said, with sudden terror and remorse, as in the midst of her happiness the image of the beloved brother, for whose sake she had so deeply sinned, rose now before her mind.

‘ Oh ! have no fear for Armand, sweetheart,’ he said tenderly, ‘ did I not pledge my word that he should be safe ? He with de Tournay and the others are even now on board the *Day Dream*. ’

‘ But how ? ’ she gasped. ‘ I do not understand.’

‘ Yet, it is simple enough, my dear,’ he said with that funny, half-shy, half-foolish laugh of his, ‘ you see, when I found that that brute Chauvelin meant to stick to me like a leech, I thought the best thing I could do, as I could not shake him off, was to take him along with me. I had to get to Armand and the others somehow, and all the roads were patrolled, and every one on the look-out for your humble servant. I knew that when I slipped through Chauvelin’s fingers at the “ Grey Cat ”, he would lie in wait for me here, whichever way I took. I wanted to keep an eye on him and his doings, and a British head is as good as a French one any day.’

Indeed it had proved to be a great deal better, and Marguerite’s heart was filled with joy and marvel, as he continued to recount to her the daring manner in which he had snatched the fugitives away, right from under Chauvelin’s very nose. ‘ Dressed as the dirty old Jew,’ he said gaily, ‘ I knew I should not be recognized. I had met Reuben Goldstein in Calais earlier in the evening. For a few gold pieces he supplied me with this rig-out, and undertook to bury himself out of sight of everybody, whilst he lent me his cart and nag.’

‘ But if Chauvelin had discovered you,’ she gasped excitedly, ‘ your disguise was good ; but he is so sharp.’

‘ Faith ! ’ he rejoined quietly, ‘ then certainly the game would have been up. I could but take the risk. I know human nature pretty well by now,’ he added, with a note of sadness in his cheery young voice, ‘ and I know these

Frenchmen cut and cut. They loathe a Jew, and never come nearer than a couple of yards of him, and I fancy that I contrived to look about as loathsome an object as it is possible to conceive.'

'Yes!—and then?' she asked eagerly.

'Then I carried out my little plan: that is to say, at first I only determined to leave everything to chance, but when I heard Chauvelin giving his orders to the soldiers, I thought that Fate and I were going to work together after all. I reckoned on the blind obedience of the soldiers. Chauvelin had ordered them, on pain of death, not to stir until the tall Englishman came. Desgas had thrown me down in a heap quite close to the hut; the soldiers took no notice of the Jew who had driven citizen Chauvelin to this spot. I managed to free my hands from the ropes with which the brute had tied me; I always carry pencil and paper with me wherever I go, and I hastily scrawled a few important instructions on a scrap of paper; then I looked about me. I crawled up to the hut, under the very noses of the soldiers, who lay under cover without stirring, just as Chauvelin had ordered them to do, then I dropped my little note into the hut, through a chink in the wall, and waited. In this note I told the fugitives to walk noiselessly out of the hut, creep down the cliffs, keep to the left until they came to the first creek, to give a certain signal, when the boat of the *Day Dream*, which lay in wait not far out to sea, would pick them up. They obeyed implicitly, fortunately for them and for me. The soldiers who saw them were equally obedient to Chauvelin's orders. They did not stir! I waited for nearly half an hour; when I knew that the fugitives were safe I gave the signal, which caused so much stir.'

And that was the whole story. It seemed so simple, and Marguerite could but marvel at the wonderful ingenuity, the boundless pluck and audacity which had evolved and helped to carry out this daring plan.

'But those brutes struck you!' she gasped in horror, at the bare recollection of the fearful indignity.

' Well ! that could not be helped,' he said gently, ' while my little wife's fate was so uncertain, I had to remain here, by her side. Never fear ! ' he added merrily, ' Chauvelin will lose nothing by waiting, I warrant ! Wait till I get him back to England !—La ! he shall pay for the thrashing he gave me with compound interest, I promise you.'

Marguerite laughed. It was so good to be beside him, to hear his cheery voice, to watch that good-humoured twinkle in his blue eyes, as he stretched out his strong arms, in longing for that foe, and in anticipation of his well-deserved punishment.

Suddenly, however, she started : the happy blush left her cheek, the light of joy died out of her eyes : she had heard a stealthy footfall overhead, and a stone had rolled down from the top of the cliffs right down to the beach below. ' What's that ? ' she whispered in horror and alarm.

' Oh ! nothing, my dear,' he muttered with a pleasant laugh, ' only a trifle you happened to have forgotten—my friend, Ffoulkes.'

' Sir Andrew ! ' she gasped. Indeed, she had wholly forgotten the devoted friend and companion, who had trusted and stood by her during all these hours of anxiety and suffering. She remembered him now, tardily and with a pang of remorse.

' Aye ! you had forgotten him, hadn't you, my dear,' said Sir Percy, merrily ; ' fortunately, I met him, not far from the "Grey Cat", before I had that interesting supper party with my friend Chauvelin. I have a score to settle with that young scoundrel !—but in the meanwhile, I told him of a very long roundabout road which Chauvelin's men would never suspect, that would bring him here just about the time when we were ready for him, eh, little woman ? '

' And he obeyed ? ' asked Marguerite, in utter astonishment.

' Without word or question. See, here he comes. He was not in the way when I did not want him, and now he

arrives in the nick of time. Ah ! he will make pretty little Suzanne a most admirable and methodical husband.'

In the meanwhile Sir Andrew Ffoulkes had cautiously worked his way down the cliffs : he stopped once or twice, pausing to listen for the whispered words which would guide him to Blakeney's hiding-place. ' Blakeney ! ' he ventured to say at last cautiously, ' Blakeney ! are you there ? '

The next moment he rounded the rock against which Sir Percy and Marguerite were leaning, and seeing the extraordinary figure clad in the long Jew's robe, he paused in sudden, complete bewilderment. But already Blakeney had struggled to his feet.

' Here I am, friend,' he said with a laugh. ' All alive ! though I do look a blessed scarecrow in these comic things.'

' Faith ! ' ejaculated Sir Andrew in boundless astonishment as he recognized his leader, ' of all the . . .' The young man had seen Marguerite, and happily checked the forcible language that rose to his lips, at sight of the dandy Sir Percy in this weird and dirty garb.

' Yes ! ' said Blakeney, calmly, ' of all the . . . hem ! . . . My friend !—I have not yet had time to ask you what you were doing in France, when I ordered you to remain in London ! Insubordination ? What ? Wait till my shoulders are less sore, and see the punishment you'll get ! '

' Faith ! I'll bear it,' said Sir Andrew, with a merry laugh, ' seeing that you are alive to give it. . . Would you have had me allow Lady Blakeney to do the journey alone ? But, in the name of heaven, man, where did you get these extraordinary clothes ? '

' They are a bit quaint, aren't they ? ' laughed Sir Percy, jovially. ' But, faith ! ' he added, with sudden earnestness and authority, ' now you are here, Ffoulkes, we must lose no more time : that brute Chauvelin may send some one to look after us.'

Marguerite was so happy, she could have stayed there for ever, hearing his voice, asking a hundred questions. But at mention of Chauvelin's name she started in quick

alarm, afraid for the dear life she would have died to save. 'But how can we get back !' she gasped ; ' the roads are full of soldiers between here and Calais and . . .'

' We are not going back to Calais, sweetheart,' he said, ' but just the other side of Gris-Nez, only about a mile from here. The boat of the *Day Dream* will meet us there.'

' The boat of the *Day Dream* ? '

' Yes ! ' he said, with a merry laugh ; ' another little trick of mine. I should have told you before that when I slipped that note into the hut, I also added another for Armand, which I directed him to leave behind, and which has sent Chauvelin and his men running at full speed back to the "Grey Cat", after me ; but the first little note contained my real instructions, including those to old Briggs. He had my orders to go out farther to sea, and then towards the west. When well out of sight of Calais he will send the ship's boat to a little creek he and I know of just beyond Gris-Nez. The men will look out for me—we have a preconcerted signal, and we shall all be safely aboard, while Chauvelin and his men solemnly sit and watch the creek which is "just opposite the 'Grey Cat'".'

' The other side of Gris-Nez ? But I—I cannot walk, Percy,' she moaned helplessly as, trying to struggle to her tired feet, she found herself unable even to stand. . .

' I will carry you, dear,' he said simply ; ' the blind leading the lame, you know.'

Sir Andrew was ready, too, to help with the precious burden, but Sir Percy would not entrust his beloved to any arms but his own. ' When you and she are both safely on board the *Day Dream*, ' he said to his young comrade, ' and I feel that little Suzanne's eyes will not greet me in England with reproachful looks, then it will be my turn to rest.'

And his arms, still vigorous in spite of fatigue and suffering, closed round Marguerite's poor, weary body, and lifted her as gently as if she had been a feather. Then, as Sir Andrew discreetly kept out of earshot, there were

many things said—or rather whispered—which even the autumn breeze did not catch.

The light of dawn was breaking in the east, when at last they reached the creek beyond Gris-Nez. The ship's boat lay in wait: in answer to a signal from Sir Percy she drew near, and two sturdy British sailors had the honour of carrying their lady into the boat.

* * *

The rest is silence!—silence and joy for those who had endured so much suffering, yet found at last a great and lasting happiness. But it is on record that at the brilliant wedding of Sir Andrew Ffoulkes, Baronet, with Suzanne de Tournay, a function at which H.R.H. the Prince of Wales and all fashionable society were present, the most beautiful woman there was unquestionably Lady Blakeney, while the clothes Sir Percy Blakeney wore were the talk of London for many days. It is also a fact that Citizen Chauvelin, the accredited agent of the French Republican Government, was not present at that or any other social function in London, after that memorable evening at Lord Grenville's ball.

QUESTIONS

CHAPTER I

1. Who were 'the wretched prisoners in the Temple'?
2. Retell in your own words how (a) Sergeant Gospierre, and (b) Sergeant Bibot, were deceived by the Scarlet Pimpernel.
3. Explain:—*blue blood, pay toll, make-up, supernatural agency.*

CHAPTER II

1. Why, do you think, did Mr Jellyband describe the two strangers playing dominoes as 'loyal subjects of King George'?
2. Why were these two strangers at first suspected by Lord Antony?
3. Explain:—*show place, man of the world, touch one's forelock, put one out.*

CHAPTER III

1. What did Lord Antony mean when he said of himself and his friends—'We were but the hands'.
2. Was Lord Antony correct in defining the chief motive of the Scarlet Pimpernel band as a love of sport?
3. Explain:—*drink a toast, sheepish, enigmatical device, all told.*

CHAPTER IV

1. Why should the arrival of the Blakeneys cause so much confusion at the inn?
2. 'Republican families which had hurled down a throne.' To what does this refer?
3. Explain:—*beat a retreat, classic brow, take stock of.*

CHAPTER V

1. In what way was Marguerite's Parisian 'circle' exclusive?
2. What are you told of Sir Percy's life before his marriage?
3. Explain:—*artistic eccentricity, a golden key, sharpening one's wits at another's expense.*

CHAPTER VI

1. Rewrite in your own words the story of how Marguerite denounced the Marquis of St. Cyr.
2. What was the work which Chauvelin suggested Marguerite might undertake for France?
3. Explain:—*accredited agent, maiden name, return the compliment, beside the question.*

CHAPTER VII

1. Give a short account of the 'outrage' committed against Sir Andrew and Lord Antony.
2. What reasons have you for supposing Chauvelin to have arranged this attack?
3. Explain:—*lurid light, dastardly outrage, a traitor after all.*

CHAPTER VIII

1. Why is Chauvelin now certain that he can enlist Marguerite's support in his efforts to discover the Scarlet Pimpernel?
2. Why did Chauvelin choose Marguerite to keep watch for him at the ball?
3. Explain:—*gala night, queen of fashion, arrow shot into the air, ugly words.*

CHAPTER IX

1. Retell the adventure of the 'scrap of paper' from the point of view of (a) Marguerite, and (b) Sir Andrew.
2. Explain:—*moral support, ill-bred, make havoc.*

CHAPTER X

1. Why did Marguerite promise not to tell Suzanne about the 'scrap of paper'?
2. Explain:—*words of fate, letters of fire.*

CHAPTER XI

1. 'The destinies of two brave men would be pitted against one another'—explain this sentence in simple language.
2. Marguerite wondered whether she had done a vile action or one that was sublime. What is your opinion?
3. Explain:—*young gallant, buttonhole a person, to have seen a trick or two in one's time.*

CHAPTER XII

1. Why, do you think, did Percy wear a 'mask' in his behaviour towards his wife?
2. Why should Marguerite feel happy at the departure of her husband?
3. Explain:—*ghost-like, business-like, beyond measure, the landing (in a house).*

CHAPTER XIII

1. What are the evidences provided by this chapter of Sir Percy's real character?
2. When had Marguerite 'twice before' seen the Scarlet Pimpernel device?
3. Explain:—*severe simplicity, man about town, solid gold.*

CHAPTER XIV

1. Show how Suzanne's news confirmed Marguerite's vague notions as to the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel.
2. 'She had done the worst crime a woman ever committed'—what crime?
3. Explain:—*kerchief, compromising letter, posting to Dover, deadly sin, cheat death.*

CHAPTER XV

1. By what arguments did Marguerite induce Sir Andrew to accompany her to France?
2. Retell this interview as it might be narrated by Sir Andrew.
3. Explain:—*order a chair, rigid etiquette, speak drily.*

CHAPTER XVI

1. What did Jellyband suspect of his two guests, and how were his suspicions dispelled?
2. 'It is only in our beautiful France that slaughter is done lawfully.' What figure of speech is this and what did Marguerite really mean?
3. Explain :—*dead against, build one's hopes.*

CHAPTER XVII

1. Describe the interior of 'The Grey Cat' inn.
2. How did Brogard try to show his 'free-born' spirit to his guests?
3. Explain :—*golden opportunity, French packet, perfunctory meals, veritable godsend, tricolour, stock-pot.*

CHAPTER XVIII

1. Write down some of the difficulties that Sir Percy had to face in planning this rescue.
2. What was the 'factor' that Marguerite, in her optimism, had overlooked?
3. Explain :—*dog one's steps, rose-coloured, singularly well placed.*

CHAPTER XIX

1. Write a short character study of Brogard the inn-keeper.
2. What was Chauvelin's plan for the capture of the Scarlet Pimpernel and the fugitives?
3. Explain :—*factotum, death-knell, whole gamut.*

CHAPTER XX

1. Why is this chapter called 'The Eagle and the Fox'?
2. Why, do you think, did Sir Percy deliberately enter the inn where Chauvelin was?
3. Explain :—*affected gesture, cotton to, holy orders, measure oneself against another, pell-mell.*

CHAPTER XXI

1. Describe the 'bargain' arranged between Chauvelin and the Jew.
2. Describe the dress and appearance of the Jew.
3. Explain :—*precious long time, sell for a consideration, corner one's game.*

CHAPTER XXII

1. What did the two horsemen report to Chauvelin?
2. What instructions did the horsemen receive from Chauvelin?
3. Explain :—*jog-trot, close in on, fall in behind.*

CHAPTER XXIII

1. Why did Marguerite decide at first not to warn the fugitives in the hut?
2. What made her change her mind?
3. Explain :—*in the wake of, to forfeit one's life, sell one's life dearly.*

CHAPTER XXIV

1. What did Chauvelin say to Marguerite before he took away the gag?
2. Why did Marguerite not cry out after the gag had been removed?
3. Explain:—*take cover, practically by her orders.*

CHAPTER XXV

1. Explain how the fugitives were able, in spite of the soldiers, to leave the hut.
2. Why did Chauvelin order the Jew to be flogged?
3. Explain:—*blood upon one's head, branded as murderer, bode no good, as luck would have it, vent one's rage, hand holding all the trumps.*

CHAPTER XXVI

1. Narrate shortly how Sir Percy outwitted Chauvelin by means of his disguise.
2. Write a brief character sketch of the Scarlet Pimpernel.
3. Explain:—*frog-eaters, and no mistake, the game is up, settle a score*

S. N: Krishnamurthy
 9th Std 'D' Section
 B. R. N. M's 1st S. S.
 16th June 1982

B. Gopalan Krishnamurthy

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